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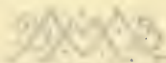




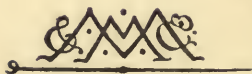
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WILLIAM COWPER

WILLIAM COWPER



LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER



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LETTERS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER

CHOSEN AND EDITED
WITH A MEMOIR AND A FEW NOTES

BY

J. G. FRAZER

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

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LETTERS

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WILLIAM OWEN

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LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER

LETTERS FROM OLNEY

CLIX

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, *Feb.* 19, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Since so it must be, so it shall be. If you will not sleep under the roof of a friend, may you never sleep under the roof of an enemy ! An enemy, however, you will not presently find. Mrs. Unwin bids me mention her affectionately, and tell you that she willingly gives up a part, for the sake of the rest, willingly, at least, as far as willingly may consist with some reluctance. I feel my reluctance too. Our design was, that you should have slept in the room that serves me for a study, and its having been occupied by you would have been an additional recommendation of it to me. But all reluctances are superseded by the thought of seeing you ; and because we have nothing so much at

heart as the wish to see you happy and comfortable, we are desirous therefore to accommodate you to your own mind, and not to ours. Mrs. Unwin has already secured for you an apartment, or rather two, just such as we could wish. The house in which you will find them is within thirty yards of our own, and opposite to it. The whole affair is thus commodiously adjusted; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say, and they will all rush into my mind together, till it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter,—sooner or later they will all come out; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our own roof, (a circumstance, that, more than any thing, reconciles us to that measure,) they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation, a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life, we shall meet each other as alive from the dead; and for my own part I can truly say, that I have not a friend in the other world whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure.

I am truly happy, my dear, in having pleased you with what you have seen of my Homer. I wish that all English readers had your unsophisticated, or rather unadulterated taste, and could relish simplicity like you. But I am well aware that in this respect I am under a disadvantage, and that many, especially many

ladies, missing many turns and prettinesses of expression that they have admired in Pope, will account my translation in those particulars defective. But I comfort myself with the thought that in reality it is no defect ; on the contrary, that the want of all such embellishments as do not belong to the original will be one of its principal merits with persons indeed capable of relishing Homer. He is the best poet that ever lived for many reasons, but for none more than for that majestic plainness that distinguishes him from all others. As an accomplished person moves gracefully without thinking of it, in like manner the dignity of Homer seems to cost him no labour. It was natural to him to say great things, and to say them well, and little ornaments were beneath his notice. If Maty, my dearest cousin, should return to you my copy with any such strictures as may make it necessary for me to see it again, before it goes to Johnson, in that case you shall send it to me, otherwise to Johnson immediately ; for he writes me word he wishes his friend to go to work upon it as soon as possible. When you come, my dear, we will hang all these critics together, for they have worried me without remorse or conscience ; at least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance with his requisitions, but plucked up my courage at last, and in the very last opportunity that I had, recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time I readily confess that the specimen is the better for

all this discipline its author has undergone ; but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination, to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr. Critic ; for as sure as you are my cousin whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief, if I would have given him leave.

My friend Bagot writes to me in a most friendly strain, and calls loudly upon me for original poetry. When I shall have done with Homer, probably he will not call in vain. Having found the prime feather of a swan on the banks of the *smug and silver Trent*, he keeps it for me.—Adieu, dear cousin,

W. C.

I am sorry that the General has such indifferent health. He must not die. I can by no means spare a person so kind to me.

CLX

To Lady Hesketh.

Mond., Feb. 27, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

As I sat by the fire-side this day after dinner, I saw your chamber windows coated over with snow, so that the glass was hardly visible. This circumstance naturally suggested the thought that it will be otherwise when you come. Then the roses will begin to blow, and perhaps the heat will be as troublesome as

the cold is now. The next thought of course was this, —three long months must pass before we shall see her ! I will, however, be as patient as I can, and comfort myself with the thought that we shall meet at last. You said in one of your letters that you had resolved to dream of nobody but of Homer and his translator. I hope you keep your resolution, for I can assure you that the last-mentioned dreams most comfortably of you. About three nights since I dreamed that, sitting in our summer-house, I saw you coming towards me. *With inexpressible pleasure I sprang to meet you, caught you in my arms, and said,—Oh my precious, precious cousin, may God make me thankful that I see thy face again !* Now, this was a dream, and no dream ;—it was only a shadow while it lasted ; but if we both live, and live to meet, it will be realized hereafter. Yet alas ! the passages and events of the day as well as of the night are little better than dreams. Poor Bagot ! whom I love sincerely because he has a singular affection for me. Ten days since he wrote me a letter, by which it appeared he was cheerful and happy. Yesterday brought me another, consisting of only about six lines, in which he tells me that his wife is dead. I transcribe it, for it is impossible to do it justice any other way.

Oh, my dear friend—Things are much altered with me since I wrote last. My harp is turned into mourning, and my music into the voice of weeping. Her whom you saw and loved,—her whom nobody ever yet saw and knew that did not love ;—her have I lost. Pray to God for me, that for Christ's sake he would

continue to comfort and support both me and mine under our great affliction. Yours ever,

WALT. BAGOT.

Blithfield, *Feb.* 23, 1786.

Poor man! I can attest the truth of what he says from my own knowledge of her, however short. There are people whose characters we penetrate and fully comprehend in a moment: she was one of those. Her character was so strongly marked in the gentleness of her aspect, her voice, her carriage, that the instant she was seen she was beloved. My knowledge of her was two hours long, and no more; yet when I took leave of her, I could not help saying, God bless you, madam! Indeed, my cousin, I never felt so much for any man. His own sensibilities are naturally of the quickest, and he was attached to her in the extreme, as it was impossible but that he must be. Mr. Madan's book happened to be mentioned when he was here, when all he said of it was—"I know not how Mr. Madan finds it, but the longer I know my wife, the more I love her." At that time I had never seen her, but when I did I wondered not.

I hardly know how to leave this subject for another, but it is necessary that I should. So farewell, poor Bagot, for the present; may God comfort thee and thy seven children!—Now for Homer, and the matters to Homer appertaining. Sephus¹ and I are of opinions perfectly different on the subject of such an advertisement as he recommends. The only proper

¹ His old friend Joseph Hill.

part for me is not to know that such a man as Pope has ever existed. I am so nice upon this subject that in that note in the specimen, in which I have accounted for the anger of Achilles, (which, I believe, I may pay myself the compliment to say was never accounted for before,) I have not even so much as hinted at the perplexity in which Pope was entangled when he endeavoured to explain it, nor at the preposterous and blundering work that he has made with it. No, my dear, as I told you once before, my attempt has itself a loud voice, and speaks a most intelligible language. Had Pope's translation been good, or had I thought it such, or had I not known that it is admitted by all whom a knowledge of the original qualifies to judge of it, to be a very defective one, I had never translated myself one line of Homer. Dr. Johnson is the only modern writer who has spoken of it in terms of approbation, at least the only one that I have met with. And his praise of it is such as convinces me, intimately acquainted as I am with Pope's performance, that he talked at random, that either he had never examined it by Homer's, or never since he was a boy. For I would undertake to produce numberless passages from it, if need were, not only ill translated, but meanly written. It is not therefore for me, convinced as I am of the truth of all I say, to go forth into the world holding up Pope's translation with one hand as a work to be extolled, and my own with the other as a work still wanted. It is plain to me that I behave with sufficient liberality on the

occasion if, neither praising nor blaming 'my predecessor, I go right forward, and leave the world to decide between us.

Now, to come nearer to myself. Poets, my dear, (it is a secret I have lately discovered,) are born to trouble, and of all poets, translators of Homer to the most. Our dear friend, the General, whom I truly love, in his last letter mortified me not a little. I do not mean by suggesting lines that he thought might be amended, for I hardly ever wrote fifty lines together that I could not afterwards have improved, but by what appeared to me an implied censure on the whole, or nearly the whole quire that I sent to you. It was a great work, he said; it should be kept long in hand;—years, if it were possible; that it stood in need of much amendment, that it ought to be made worthy of me, that he could not think of showing it to Maty, that he could not even think of laying it before Johnson and his friend in its present condition. Now, my dear, understand thou this: if there lives a man who stands clear of the charge of careless writing, I am that man. I might prudently, perhaps, but I could not honestly, admit that charge: it would account in a way favourable to my own ability for many defects of which I am guilty, but it would be disingenuous and untrue. The copy which I sent to you was almost a new, I mean a second, translation, as far as it went. With the first I had taken pains, but with the second I took more. I weighed many expressions, exacted from myself the utmost fidelity to my author, and tried all

the numbers upon my own ear again and again. If, therefore, after all this care, the execution be such as in the General's account it seems to be, I appear to have made shipwreck of my hopes at once. He said, indeed, that the similes delighted him, and the catalogue of the ships surpassed his expectations: but his commendation of so small a portion of the whole affected me rather painfully, as it seemed to amount to an implied condemnation of the rest. I have been the more uneasy because I know his taste to be good, and by the selection that he made of lines that he thought should be altered, he proved it such. I altered them all, and thanked him, as I could very sincerely, for his friendly attention. Now what is the present state of my mind on this subject? It is this. I do not myself think ill of what I have done, nor at the same time so foolishly well as to suppose that it has no blemishes. But I am sadly afraid that the General's anxiety will make him extremely difficult to be pleased: I fear that he will require of me more than any other man would require, or than he himself would require of any other writer. What I can do to give him satisfaction, I am perfectly ready to do; but it is possible for an anxious friend to demand more than my ability could perform. Not a syllable of all this, my dear, to him, or to any creature.—Mum!

Your question, your natural, well warranted, and most reasonable question concerning me and Mrs. Unwin, shall be answered at large when we meet. But to Mrs. Unwin I refer you for that answer; she

is most desirous to give you a most explicit one. I have a history, my dear, belonging to me, which I am not the proper person to relate. You have heard somewhat of it,—as much as it was possible for me to write ; but that *somewhat* bears a most inconsiderable proportion to the whole.

All intercourse has ceased between us and Lady Austen almost these two years. This mystery shall also be accounted for when you come. She has left Bristol, and is at present settled within a mile of us with her sister. You are candid, and will give me credit when I say the fault is not with us.

I have disposed of thirty-three papers of Proposals,—even I. Mr. Throckmorton has most obligingly given me his name, and has undertaken the disposal of twelve. Lord Archibald Hamilton has also subscribed, at the instance of a neighbour of mine, and does me the honour to say that he subscribes with pleasure. Adieu ! my beloved cousin ; thank you for all your welcome intelligence. I had need of it.
—Yours most truly,

WM. COWPER.

CLXI

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, March 6, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Your opinion has more weight with me than that of

all the critics in the world ; and to give you a proof of it, I make you a concession that I would hardly have made to them all united. I do not indeed absolutely covenant, promise, and agree, that I will discard *all* my elisions, but I hereby bind myself to dismiss *as many* of them as, without sacrificing energy to sound, I can. It is incumbent upon me in the mean time to say something in justification of the few that I shall retain, that I may not seem a poet mounted rather on a mule than on Pegasus. In the first place, *The* is a barbarism. We are indebted for it to the Celts, or the Goths, or to the Saxons, and perhaps to them all. In the two best languages that ever were spoken, the Greek and the Latin, there is no similar incumbrance of expression to be found. Secondly, the perpetual use of it in our language is to us miserable poets attended with two great inconveniences. Our verse consisting only of ten syllables, it not unfrequently happens that a fifth part of a line is to be engrossed, and necessarily, too, (unless elision prevents it,) by this abominable intruder ; and, which is worse in my account, open vowels are continually the consequence—*The* element—*The* air, etc. Thirdly, the French, who are equally with the English chargeable with barbarism in this particular, dispose of their *Le* and their *La* without ceremony, and always take care that they shall be absorbed, both in verse and in prose, in the vowel that immediately follows them. Fourthly, and I believe lastly, (and for your sake I wish it may prove so,) the practice of cutting short a

The is warranted by Milton, who of all English poets that ever lived, had certainly the finest ear. Dr. Warton, indeed, has dared to say that he had a bad one; for which he deserves, as far as critical demerit can deserve it, to lose his own. I thought I had done, but there is still a fifthly behind, and it is this,—that the custom of abbreviating *The* belongs to the style in which, in my advertisement annexed to the specimen, I profess to write. The use of that style would have warranted me in the practice of much greater liberty of this sort than I ever intended to take. In perfect consistence with that style I might say I' th' tempest, I' th' door-way, etc., which, however, I would not allow myself to do, because I was aware that it would be objected to, and with reason. But it seems to me for the causes above said, that when I shorten *The*, before a vowel, or before *wh*, as in the line you mention,

“Than th' whole broad Hellespont in all his parts,”

my licence is not equally exceptionable, because *W*, though he rank as a consonant in the word *whole*, is not allowed to announce himself to the ear; and *H* is an aspirate. But as I said at the beginning, so say I still,—I am most willing to conform myself to your very sensible observation, that it is necessary, if we would please, to consult the taste of our own day; neither would I have pelted you, my dearest cousin, with any part of this volley of good reasons, had I not designed them as an answer to those objections which

you say you have heard from others. But I only mention them. Though satisfactory to myself, I waive them, and will allow to *The* his whole dimensions, whensoever it can be done.

Thou only critic of my verse that is to be found in all the earth, whom I love, what shall I say in answer to your own objection to that passage,—

“Softly he placed his hand
On th’ old man’s hand, and push’d it gently away.”

I can say neither more nor less than this, that when our dear friend, the General, sent me his opinion of the specimen, quoting those very words from it, he added, “With this part I was particularly pleased; there is nothing in poetry more descriptive.” Such were his very words. Taste, my dear, is various; there is nothing so various, and even between persons of the best taste there are diversities of opinion on the same subject, for which it is not possible to account. So much for these matters.

You advise me to consult the General, and to confide in him. I follow your advice, and have done both. By the last post I asked his permission to send him the books of my Homer as fast as I should finish them off. I shall be glad of his remarks, and more glad than of any thing to do that which I hope may be agreeable to him. They will of course pass into your hands before they are sent to Johnson. The quire that I sent is now in the hands of Johnson’s friend. I intended to have told you in my last, but forgot it, that Johnson behaves very handsomely in the affair of

my two volumes. He acts with a liberality not often found in persons of his occupation, and to mention it, when occasion calls me to it, is a justice due to him.

I am very much pleased with Mr. Stanley's letter. Several compliments were paid me, on the subject of that first volume, by my own friends; but I do not recollect that I ever knew the opinion of a stranger about it before, whether favourable or otherwise. I only heard by a side wind, that it was very much read in Scotland, and more than here.

Farewell, my dearest cousin, whom we expect, of whom we talk continually, and whom we continually long for.

W. C.

Your anxious wishes for my success delight me, and you may rest assured, my dear, that I have all the ambition on the subject that you can wish me to feel. I more than admire my author. I often stand astonished at his beauties. I am for ever amused with the translation of him, and I have received a thousand encouragements. These are all so many happy omens, that I hope shall be verified by the event.

CLXII

To Lady Hesketh.

Monday, March 20, 1786.

Those mornings that I set apart for writing to you, my dearest cousin, are my holiday mornings. At those

times I give myself a dispensation from all poetical employments, and as soon as I cease to converse with you, betake myself to a walk in the garden. You will observe therefore that my health cannot possibly suffer by such a procedure, but is rather likely to be benefited; for finding it easy as well as pleasant to write when I write to you, I consequently spend less time at my desk than when Homer lies before me, and have more opportunity of taking exercise and air. Though you *seem* to be so, you are not *in fact* beforehand with me in what you say of my letters, for it has long been an agreed point between me and Mrs. Unwin that yours are the best in the world. You will say—"that is impossible, for I always write what comes uppermost, and never trouble myself either about method or expression." And for that very reason, my dear, they are what they are, so good that they could not be better. As to expression, you have no need to study it; yours is sure to be such as it ought; and as to method, you know as well as I, that it is never more out of its place than in a letter. I have only to add on this subject, that not a word of all this is designed as a compliment to you, but merely as a justification of our opinion.

I begin heartily to wish that Signor Fuseli had accomplished his critique of what now lies before him. You have twice been disagreeably constrained to apologize to Mr. Burrows for the delay, and I am very unwilling that you should be a third time reduced to that necessity. I shall be obliged when it comes to

my hands again to bestow on it perhaps two or three sittings, in order to accommodate the copy to his remarks, and to give it such further improvements of my own as it shall appear to me to be still susceptible of: which done, I shall remit it instantly to you. Should you have occasion any time to send your Samuel city-ward, I shall be glad if you will charge him with my poetry-box for Johnson, that he may pack the papers in it. This however is not necessary, for they will probably come equally safe under any such cover as he will give them. I bestowed two mornings in the last week, on the extirpation of elisions only. And from all that part of the second book, which you have not seen, and from the third and fourth completely, have so effectually weeded them out, that in all those quarters you cannot find above three; and those not only pardonable on account of necessity, but such as you would yourself approve, I believe, rather than the vacuity that would be occasioned by their removal. I displaced, I suppose, not less than thirty, some of them horrible creatures, and such as even I myself was glad to be rid of. The same care I shall take throughout the whole translation. I am also a very good boy in another respect: I use all possible diligence to give a graceful gait and movement to such lines as rather hobbled a little before, with this reserve however, that when the sense requires it, or when for the sake of avoiding a monotonous cadence of the lines, of which there is always danger in so long a work, it shall appear to be

prudent, I still leave a verse behind me that has some uneasiness in its formation. It is not possible to read *Paradise Lost*, with an ear for harmony, without being sensible of the great advantage which Milton drew from such a management. One line only occurs to me at present as an instance of what I mean, and I cannot stop to recollect more ; but rumbling and rough as it is, it is in my mind, considering the subjects, one of the finest that ever was composed. He is describing hell ; and as if the contemplation of such a scene had scared him out of all his poetical wits, he finishes the terrible picture thus,—

Abominable, unutterable, and worse
Than fancy yet had formed, or fear conceived
Gorgons and hydras and chimæras dire.

Agree with me, my dear, that the deformity of the first of these three lines is the greatest beauty imaginable. . This, however, is only an instance of uncouthness where the *sense* recommends it. Had I the book before me, I could soon fill my sheet with quotations of irregular lines taken from the most beautiful parts of his poem, which he used partly as foils to the rest, and partly to relieve the ear, as I said, from the tedium of an unvaried and perpetual smoothness. This I understand to be one of the great secrets of verse-writing in a piece of great length. Uncritical readers find that they perform a long journey through several hundred pages perhaps without weariness ; they find the numbers harmonious, but are not aware of the art by which that harmony is brought to pass,

much less suspect that a violation of all harmony on some occasions, is the very thing to which they are not a little indebted for their gratification. Half strained critics are disgusted ; they discover that this line and that line limps, but cannot enter into the poet's reasons for making it do so ; and critics indeed, who have a well-formed ear and a true classical taste are pleased, and know how to account for it. I know, my beloved cousin, that you will not allow yourself to be of the last mentioned order. You disdain all intelligence in these matters, and I have no doubt of the sincerity with which you do it. But you must pardon me if I estimate your judgement in poetry at a much higher rate than yourself. Of this, at least I am sure, that of all the remarks you have made upon mine not one has bespoke any deficiency of taste or judgement in the maker. On the contrary, I have seen good reason to acquiesce in them all, the *cask* excepted, which is a word that the Greek makes necessary, and the "*gently away*," which I do not pretend to be no blemish, but an excusable one.

Than the broad Hellespont in all his parts,

—so it shall stand, my dear, in the volume, you may rest assured ; for though I have in my own mind stickled much for the insertion of the word *whole*, as in that place emphatical, I am become now a convert to your opinion, and judge the line mended by the change : smoother it is, no doubt, and sufficiently emphatical into the bargain.

Many thanks for Mr. Hornby's note, (whom, by the way, I before called Stanley, not being able to read his name, even in his own handwriting,) every such piece of information is a clap on the back, the effect of which I feel instantly in my head, and write the better for it. *The Task* has succeeded beyond my utmost expectations ; if Homer succeed as well,—and it shall not fail through any negligence of mine, I shall account my fortune, as a poet, made for ever.

You must not think too highly of my loyalty. A true Whig always loves a good King. But this by way of parenthesis.—I was going to observe that the day puts me in mind of June,—clear sun and soft air. Mrs. Unwin never walks in the garden without looking at the borders to consider which of all the flowers will be blown in June. She has my fear of strangers, but she has no fear of *you*. *Au contraire*, she, as well as somebody else, most heartily loves and longs to see you.—Adieu, my dear coz., ever yours,

W. C.

CLXIII

To Lady Hesketh.

Monday, April 10, 1786.

That's my good cousin ! now I love you ! now I will think of June as you do, that it is the pleasantest of all months, unless you should happen to be here in November too, and make it equally delightful. Before

I shall have finished my letter, Mrs. Unwin will have taken a view of the house concerning which you inquire, and I shall be able to give you a circumstantial account of it. The man who built it is lately dead. He had been a common sailor, and assisted under Wolfe and Amherst at the taking of Quebec. When we came hither he was almost penniless, but climbing by degrees into the lace-business, amassed money, and built the house in question. Just before he died, having an enterprising genius, he put almost his whole substance to hazard in sending a large cargo of lace to America, and the venture failing, he has left his widow in penury and distress. For this reason, I conclude that she will have no objection to letting as much of her house as my cousin will have occasion for, and have therefore given you this short history of the matter. The bed is the best in the town, and the honest tar's folly was much laughed at, when it was known that he, who had so often swung in a hammock, had given twenty pounds for a bed. But now I begin to hope that he made a wiser bargain than once I thought it. She is no gentlewoman, as you may suppose, but she is nevertheless a very quiet, decent, sober body, and well respected among her neighbours.

But Hadley, my dearest cousin, what is to be said of Hadley? Only this at present, that having such an inhabitant as Mr. Burrows, and the hope belonging to it of such another inhabitant as yourself, it has all charms, all possible recommendations. Yes; had I

the wings that David wished for, I would surely stretch them to their utmost extent that I might reach any place where I should have you to converse with perhaps half the year. But alas, my dear, instead of wings, I have a chain and a collar; the history of which collar and chain Mrs. Unwin shall give you when you come; else I would fly, and she would fly also, with the utmost alacrity to Hadley, or whithersoever you should call us, for Olney has no hold upon us in particular. Here have we no family connexions, no neighbours with whom we can associate, no friendships. If the country is pleasant, so also are other countries; and so far as income is concerned, we should not, I suppose, find ourselves in a more expensive situation at Hadley, or any where, than here. But there are letts and hinderances which no power of man can remove, which will make your poor heart ache, my dear, when you come to know them. I will not say that they can never be removed, because I will not set bounds to that which has no bounds—the mercy of God; but of the removal of them there is no present apparent probability. I knew a Mr. Burrows once; it was when I lived in the Temple; so far knew him that we simpered at each other when we met, and on opposite sides of the way touched hats. This Mr. Burrows, though at that time a young man, was rather remarkable for corpulence, and yet tall. He was at the bar. On a sudden I missed him, and was informed soon after that he had taken orders. Is it possible that your Mr. Burrows and mine can be the

same? The imagination is not famous for taking good likenesses of persons and faces that we never saw. In general the picture that we draw in our minds of an *inconnu* is of all possible pictures the most unlike the original. So it has happened to me in this instance: my fancy assured me that Mr. Burrows was a slim, elegant young man, dressed always to the very point of exactness, with a sharp face, a small voice, a delicate address, and the gentlest manners. Such was my dream of Mr. Burrows, and how my dream of him came to be such I know not, unless it arose from what I seemed to have collected out of the several letters in which you have mentioned him. From them I learned that he has wit, sense, taste, and genius, with which qualities I do not generally connect the ideas of bulk and rotundity; and from them I also learned that he has numerous connexions at your end of the town, where the company of those who have any thing rough in their exterior is least likely to be coveted. So it must have come to pass that I made to myself such a very unsuitable representation of him. But I am not sorry that he is such as he is. He is no loser by the bargain, in my account. I am not the less delighted with his high approbation, and wish for no better fortune as a poet, than always so to please such men as Mr. Burrows. I will not say, my dear, that you yourself gain any advantage in my opinion by the difference; for to seat you higher there than you were always seated, is not possible. I will only observe in this instance, as always in all

instances, I discover a proof of your own good sense and discernment, who finding in Mr. Burrows a mind so deserving of your esteem and regard, have not suffered your eye to prejudice you against it ; a *faux pas* into which I have known ladies of very good understanding betrayed ere now, I assure you. Had there been a question last year of our meeting at Olney, I should have felt myself particularly interested in this inattention of yours to the figure, for the sake of its contents ; for at that time I had rather more body than it became a man who pretends to public approbation as a poet, to carry about him. But, thanks to Dr. Kerr, I do not at present measure an inch more in the girth than is perfectly consistent with the highest pretensions in that way. Apollo himself is hardly less chargeable with prominence about the waist than I am.

I by no means insist upon making ladies of the Trojan women, unless I can reconcile you to the term. But I must observe in the first place, that though in our language the word be of modern use, it is likewise very ancient. We read in our oldest Bibles of the elect *Lady*, and of Babylon the *Lady* of kingdoms. In the next place, the Grecians, Homer at least, when a woman of rank is accosted, takes care in many instances that she shall be addressed in a style suited to her condition, for which purpose he employs a word more magnificent in its amount than even lady, and which literally signifies very little less than goddess. The word that I mean—that I may make it legible to

you, is *Daimonie*. There were, no doubt, in Troy,—but I will say no more of it. I have that to write about to my English lady, that makes all the ladies of antiquity nothing worth to me.

We are this moment returned from the house above mentioned. The parlour is small and neat, not a mere cupboard, but very passable: the chamber is better, and quite smart. There is a little room close to your own for Mrs. Eaton, and there is room for Cookee and Samuel. The terms are half a guinea a week; but it seems as if we were never to take a step without a stumble. The kitchen is bad,—it has, indeed, never been used except as a washhouse; for people at Olney do not eat and drink as they do in other places. I do not mean, my dear, that they quaff nectar or feed on ambrosia, but *tout au contraire*. So what must be done about this abominable kitchen? It is out of doors: that is not amiss. It has neither range nor jack: that is terrible. But then range and jack are not unattainables; they may be easily supplied. And if it were not—abominable kitchen that it is, no bigger than half an egg-shell, shift might be made. The good woman is content that your servants should eat and drink in her parlour, but expects that they shall disperse themselves when they have done. But whither, who can say? unless into the arbour in the garden, for that they should solace themselves in said kitchen were hardly to be expected. While I write this, Mrs. U. is gone to attempt a treaty with the linendraper over the way, which, if she succeeds, will

be best of all, because the rooms are better, and it is just at hand. I must halt till she returns.—She returns;—nothing done. She is gone again to another place. Once more I halt. Again she returns and opens the parlour door with these tidings:—"I have succeeded beyond my utmost hopes. I went to Maurice Smith's, (he you must know, my dear, is a Jack-of-all-trades;) I said, do you know if Mr. Brightman could and would let lodgings ready furnished to a lady with three servants? Maurice's wife calls out, (she is a Quaker,) 'Why dost thee not take the vicarage?' I replied, There is no furniture. 'Pshaw!' quoth Maurice's wife; 'we will furnish it for thee, and at the lowest rate:—from a bed to a platter we will find all.'—And what do you intend now? said I to Mrs. Unwin. "Why now," quoth she, "I am going to the curate to hear what *he* says." So away she goes, and in about twenty minutes returns.—"Well, now it is all settled. Lady H. is to have all the vicarage, except two rooms, at the rate of ten guineas a year; and Maurice will furnish it for five guineas from June to November, inclusive." So, my dear, you and your train are provided for to my heart's content. They are Lady Austen's lodgings, only with more room, and at the same price. You have a parlour sixteen feet by fourteen, chamber ditto; a room for your own maid, near to your own, that I have occupied many a good time; an exceeding good garret for Cooke, and another ditto, at a convenient distance, for Samuel; a cellar, a good kitchen, the

use of the garden ;—in short, all that you can want. Give us our commission in your next, and all shall be ready by the first of June. You will observe, my beloved cousin, that it is not in all above eight shillings a week in the whole year, or but a trifle more. And the furniture is really smart, and the beds good. But you must find your own linen. Come then, my beloved cousin, for I am determined that, whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be *Vicar* of Olney. Come and cheer my heart. I have left many things unsaid, but shall note them another time. Adieu !—Ever yours,

W. C.

I am so charmed with the subject that concludes my letter that I grudge every inch of paper to any other. Yet must I allow myself space to say that Lord Dartmouth's behaviour to you at the concert has won my heart to him more than ever. It was such a well-timed kindness to me, and so evidently performed with an equal design of giving pleasure to you, that I love him for it at my heart. I have never, indeed, at any time, had occasion to charge him, as I know that many have done, with want of warmth in his friendship.—I honour you, my dear, for your constellation of nobles. I rejoice that the contents of my box have pleased you : may I never write anything that does not ! My friend Bull brought me to-day the last *Gentleman's Magazine*. There your cousin is held up again. Oh rare coz !

CLXIV

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, April 17, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

If you will not quote Solomon, my dearest cousin, I will. He says, and as beautiful as truly—"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!" I feel how much reason he had on his side when he made this observation, and am myself sick of your fortnight's delay. . . .

The vicarage was built by Lord Dartmouth, and was not finished till some time after we arrived at Olney, consequently it is new. It is a smart stone building, well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden, but rather calculated for use than ornament. It is square, and well walled, but has neither arbour, nor alcove, nor other shade, except the shadow of the house. But we have two gardens, which are yours. Between your mansion and ours is interposed nothing but an orchard, into which a door opening out of our garden affords us the easiest communication imaginable, will save the roundabout by the town, and make both houses one. Your chamber-windows look over the river, and over the meadows, to a village called Emberton, and command the whole length of a long bridge, described by a certain poet, together with a view of the road at a

distance. Should you wish for books at Olney, you must bring them with you, or you will wish in vain, for I have none but the works of a certain poet, Cowper, of whom perhaps you have heard, and they are as yet but two volumes. They may multiply hereafter ; but at present they are no more.

You are the first person for whom I have heard Mrs. Unwin express such feelings as she does for you. She is not profuse in professions, nor forward to enter into treaties of friendship with new faces ; but when her friendship is once engaged, it may be confided in even unto death. She loves you already, and how much more will she love you before this time twelve-month ! I have indeed endeavoured to describe you to her, but perfectly as I have you by heart, I am sensible that my picture cannot do you justice. I never saw one that did. Be you what you may, you are much beloved, and will be so at Olney, and Mrs. U. expects you with the pleasure that one feels at the return of a long absent, dear relation ; that is to say, with a pleasure such as mine. She sends you her warmest affections.

On Friday I received a letter from dear Anonymous,¹ apprizing me of a parcel that the coach would bring me on Saturday. Who is there in the world that

¹ The Anonymous was Cowper's cousin, Theodora Cowper, sister of Lady Hesketh. In his youth Cowper loved her, and his love was returned, but her father, Ashley Cowper, refused his consent to their engagement. After their separation they never met again, and in later life Cowper forgot her. But she loved him to the last, and died long after him unmarried.

has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions, lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed any thing so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy. Well then, I will be content without it; and so content that, though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me, while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort, or to steal the secret from you. I should think myself as justly punishable as the Bethshemites, for looking into the ark, which they were not allowed to touch.

I have not sent for Kerr, for Kerr can do nothing but send me to Bath, and to Bath I cannot go for a

thousand reasons. The summer will set me up again. I grow fat every day, and shall be as big as Gog or Magog, or both put together, before you come.

I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house ; but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I, and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, cousin ! how could you do so ? I am pleased with Lord Thurlow's enquiries about me. If he takes it into that inimitable head of his, he may make a man of me yet. I could love him heartily, if he would but deserve it at my hands. That I did so once is certain. The Duchess of ———, who in the world set her a-going ? But if all the duchesses in the world were spinning, like so many whirligigs, for my benefit, I would not stop them. It is a noble thing to be a poet, it makes all the world so lively. I might have preached more sermons than even Tillotson did, and better, and the world would have been still fast asleep ; but a volume of verse is a fiddle that puts the universe in motion.—Yours, my dear friend and cousin,

W. C.

CLXV

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, April 24, 1786.

Your letters are so much my comfort, that I often tremble lest by any accident I should be disappointed ; and the more because you have been, more than once, so engaged in company on the writing day, that I have had a narrow escape. Let me give you a piece of good counsel, my cousin : follow my laudable example,—write when you can ; take Time's forelock in one hand, and a pen in the other, and so make sure of your opportunity. It is well for me that you write faster than any body, and more in an hour than other people in two, else I know not what would become of me. When I read your letters I hear you talk, and I love talking letters dearly, especially from you. Well ! the middle of June will not be always a thousand years off, and when it comes I shall hear you, and see you too, and shall not care a farthing then if you do not touch a pen in a month. By the way, you must either send me, or bring me some more paper, for before the moon shall have performed a few more revolutions I shall not have a scrap left,—and tedious revolutions they are just now, that is certain.

I give you leave to be as peremptory as you please, especially at a distance ; but when you say that you are a Cowper, (and the better it is for the Cowpers that such you are, and I give them joy of you, with

all my heart,) you must not forget that I boast myself a Cowper too, and have my humours, and fancies, and purposes, and determinations, as well as others of my name, and hold them as fast as they can. *You* indeed tell *me* how often I shall see you when you come! A pretty story truly. I am a *he* Cowper, my dear, and claim the privileges that belong to my noble sex. But these matters shall be settled, as my cousin Agamemnon used to say, at a more convenient time.

I shall rejoice to see the letter you promise me, for though I met with a morsel of praise last week, I do not know that the week current is likely to produce me any, and having lately been pretty much pampered with that diet, I expect to find myself rather hungry by the time when your next letter shall arrive. It will therefore be very opportune. The morsel, above alluded to, came from—whom do you think? From ———, but she desires that her authorship may be a secret. And in my answer I promised not to divulge it except to you. It is a pretty copy of verses, neatly written, and well turned, and when you come you shall see them. I intend to keep all pretty things to myself till then, that they may serve me as a bait to lure you hither more effectually. The last letter that I had from ——— I received so many years since, that it seems as if it had reached me a good while before I was born.

I was grieved at the heart that the General could not come, and that illness was in part the cause that hindered him. I have sent him, by his express desire,

a new edition of the first book, and half the second. He would not suffer me to send it to you, my dear, lest you should post it away to Maty at once. He did not give that reason, but, being shrewd, I found it.

The grass begins to grow, and the leaves to bud, and every thing is preparing to be beautiful against you come.—Adieu!

W. C.

You enquire of our walks, I perceive, as well as of our rides: they are beautiful. You enquire also concerning a cellar: you have two cellars. Oh! what years have passed since we took the same walks, and drank out of the same bottle! but a few more weeks, and then!

CLXVI

To Lady Hesketh.

May I, 1786.

You need not trouble yourself, my dearest cousin, about paper, my kind and good friend the General having undertaken of his own mere motion to send me all that I ever want, whether for transcript or correspondence. My dear, there is no possible project within the compass of invention, by which you can be released from the necessity of keeping your own nags at Olney, if you keep your carriage here. At the Swan they have no horses, or, which is equally negative in such a case, they have but one. At the

Bull, indeed, they keep a chaise ; but, not to mention the disagreeable of using one inn and hiring from another, or the extortionate demands that the woman of the Bull ever makes when anything either gentle or noble is so unhappy as to fall into her hands, her steeds are so seldom disengaged, that you would find the disappointments endless. The chaise of course is engaged equally, and the town of Olney affords nothing else into which you could put your person. All these matters taken together, and another reason with them, which I shall presently subjoin,—it appeared to us so indispensable a requisite to your comfort here that you should have your own, both carriage and horses, that we have this day actually engaged accommodation for them at the Swan aforesaid.

Our walks are, as I told you, beautiful ; but it is a walk to get at them ; and though when you come, I shall take you into training, as the jockeys say, I doubt not that I shall make a nimble and good walker of you in a short time, you would find, as even I do in warm weather, that the preparatory steps are rather too many in number. Weston, which is our pleasantest retreat of all, is a mile off, and there is not in that whole mile to be found so much shade as would cover you. Mrs. Unwin and I have for many years walked thither every day in the year, when the weather would permit ; and to speak like a poet, the limes and the elms of Weston can witness for us both how often we have sighed and said,—“ Oh ! that our garden opened into this grove, or into this wilderness ! for we are

fatigued before we reach them, and when we have reached them, have not time enough to enjoy them." Thus stands the case, my dear, and the unavoidable *ergo* stares you in the face. Would I could do so too just at this moment!—We have three or four other walks, which are all pleasant in their way; but, except one, they all lie at such a distance as you would find heinously incommodious. But Weston, as I said before, is our favourite: of that we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was, indeed, some time since, in a neighbouring parish called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little paradise: but the poplars have been felled, and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses on this melancholy occasion, which, though they have been printed, I dare say you never saw. When you come, therefore, you shall see them; but, as I told you in my last, not before. No, my dear, not a moment sooner; and for the reason in my last given I shall disobey your mandate with respect to those of F. Hill; and for another reason also:—if I copy them, they will occupy all the rest of my paper, which I cannot spare; and if I enclose the original, I must send my packet to Palace Yard, and you finding that the post-

man passed your door without dropping a letter from me would conclude that I had neglected to write; and I will not incur such a suspicion in your mind for a moment.

On Saturday,—for sooner than Saturday, we could not, on account of the weather,—we paid our visit at Weston, and a very agreeable visit we found it. We encountered there, besides the family, four ladies, all strange to us. One of them was a Miss Bagot, a sister of my friend Walter's; and another of them was a Mrs. Chester, his sister-in-law. Mr. Chester, his brother, lives at Chicheley, about four miles from Olney. Poor Mrs. Bagot was remembered with tears by Mrs. Chester: she is by every body's account of her a most amiable woman. Such also, I dare say, is Miss Bagot; but the room in which we were received was large, and she sitting at the side of it, exactly opposite to me, I had neither lungs nor courage to halloo at her; therefore nothing passed between us. I chatted a good deal with my neighbours; but you know, my dear, I am not famous for vociferation where there are ears not much accustomed to my voice. Nothing can be more obliging than the behaviour of the Throckmortons has ever been to us: they long since gave us the keys of all their retreats, even of their kitchen-garden. And that you may not suspect your cousin of being any other than a very obliging creature too, I will give you a stroke of his politesse. When they were here they desired to see the garden and greenhouse. I am proud of neither,

except in poetry, because there I can fib without lying, and represent them better than they are. However, I conducted them to the sight, and having set each of the ladies with her head in a bush of myrtle, I took out my scissors and cut a bouquet for each of them. When we were with *them* Mrs. Throckmorton told me that she had put all the slips into water, for she should be so glad to make them grow, and asked me if they would strike root. I replied, that I had known such things happen, but believed that they were very rare, and recommended a hot-bed rather, and she immediately resolved that they should have one. Now comes the period at which your cousin shines. In the evening I ordered my labourer to trundle up a wheelbarrow of myrtles and canary lavender, (a most fragrant plant,) to Weston, with which I sent a note to Mrs. Throckmorton, recommending them to her protection. *Dites moi, ma chere, ne suis-je homme tout à fait poli?*

Weston, as I told you, is about a mile off, but in truth it is rather more. Gayhurst is five miles off: I have walked there, but I never walked thither. I have not these many years been such an extravagant tramper as I once was. I did myself no good I believe by pilgrimages of such immoderate length. The Chesters, the Throckmortons, the Wrights, are all of them good-natured agreeable people, and I rejoice, for your sake, that they lie all within your beat. Of the rest of our neighbours I know nothing. They are not, indeed, many. A Mr. Praed lives at a seat called

Tyringham, which is also about five miles hence ; but him I never saw, save once, when I saw him jump over a rail at Weston. There is a Mr. Towers at a place called Astwoodberry, about seven miles off ; but he is a foxhunter merely : and Lord Egmont dwelt in a hired house at a place called Woolaston, at the same distance ; but he hired it merely by way of kennel to hold him during the hunting season, and by this time, I suppose, has left it.

The copper is going to work for you again. Fifty gallons of good beer, added to seventy, will serve to moisten your maidens' lips, and the throats of your lacqueys and your coachee's, till the season for brewing returns, for it does not succeed in warm weather.

Mrs. Unwin sends you her affections ; and the words that follow I take from her mouth as she delivers them : "Tell Lady Hesketh that I have the sincerest complacency in the expectation of her ; and in observing how all things concur and coincide that can bid fair to make her stay at Olney agreeable, insomuch that she seems only to wave her pen and the thing she wants springs up in an instant." May Heaven bless you, my ever dear, dear cousin. Farewell.—
Yours,

WM. COWPER.

I have heard that Dr. Maty has criticised my specimen with asperity. Is there any truth in this, and how much ? or is there none ? It has vexed me.—I have a fine passion-tree in a green tub, that I

destine to your parlour chimney: it will be full of flowers.

CLXVII

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, May 8, 1786.

. . . One evening last week Mrs. Unwin and I took our walk to Weston, and as we were returning through the grove opposite to the house, the Throckmortons presented themselves at the door. They are owners of a house at Weston, at present empty. It is a very good one, infinitely superior to ours. When we drank chocolate with them, they both expressed their ardent desire that we would take it, wishing to have us for nearer neighbours. If you, my cousin, were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered up all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it for ever without danger of ejectment; whereas your possession of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar, who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slipper even in winter. A most unfortunate mistake was made by that gentleman's bailiff in his absence. Just before he left Weston last year for the winter, he gave him orders to cut

short the tops of the flowering shrubs that lined a serpentine walk in a delightful grove, celebrated by my poetship in a little piece that you remember was called the Shrubbery. The dunce, misapprehending the order, cut down and faggoted up the whole grove, leaving neither tree, bush, nor twig,—nothing but stumps about as high as my ancle. Mrs. Throckmorton told us that she never saw her husband so angry in her life. I judge indeed by his physiognomy, which has great sweetness in it, that he is very little addicted to that infernal passion. But had he cudgelled the man for his cruel blunder, and the havoc made in consequence of it, I could have excused him.

I felt myself really concerned for the Chancellor's illness, and from what I learned of it, both from the papers, and from General Cowper, concluded that he must die. I am accordingly delighted in the same proportion with the news of his recovery. May he live, and live to be still the support of Government! If it shall be his good pleasure to render me personally any material service, I have no objection to it. But Heaven knows, that it is impossible for any living wight to bestow less thought on that subject than myself.—May God be ever with you, my beloved cousin!

W. C.

CLXVIII

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, May 15, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

From this very morning I begin to date the last month of our long separation, and confidently and most comfortably hope that before the fifteenth of June shall present itself, we shall have seen each other. Is it not so? And will it not be one of the most extraordinary eras of my extraordinary life? A year ago, we neither corresponded, nor expected to meet in this world. But this world is a scene of marvellous events, many of them more marvellous than fiction itself would dare to hazard; and, blessed be God! they are not all of the distressing kind. Now and then in the course of an existence, whose hue is for the most part sable, a day turns up that makes amends for many sighs, and many subjects of complaint. Such a day shall I account the day of your arrival at Olney.

Wherefore is it (canst thou tell me?) that together with all those delightful sensations, to which the sight of a long absent dear friend gives birth, there is a mixture of something painful; flutterings, and tumults, and I know not what accompaniments of our pleasure, that are in fact perfectly foreign from the occasion? Such I feel when I think of our meeting; and such I suppose feel you; and the nearer the crisis approaches,

the more I am sensible of them. I know beforehand that they will increase with every turn of the wheels that shall convey me to Newport, when I shall set out to meet you; and that when we actually meet, the pleasure, and this unaccountable pain together, will be as much as I shall be able to support. I am utterly at a loss for the cause, and can only resolve it into that appointment, by which it has been foreordained that all human delights shall be qualified and mingled with their contraries. For there is nothing formidable in you. To me at least there is nothing such, no, not even in your menaces, unless when you threaten me to write no more. Nay, I verily believe, did I not know you to be what you are, and had less affection for you than I have, I should have fewer of these emotions, of which I would have none, if I could help it. But a fig for them all! Let us resolve to combat with, and to conquer them. They are dreams: they are illusions of the judgement. Some enemy that hates the happiness of human kind, and is ever industrious to dash it, works them in us; and their being so perfectly unreasonable as they are is a proof of it. Nothing that is such can be the work of a good agent. This I know too by experience, that, like all other illusions, they exist only by force of imagination, are indebted for their prevalence to the absence of their object, and in a few moments after its appearance cease. So then this is a settled point, and the case stands thus. You will tremble as you draw near to Newport, and so shall I: but we will both recollect that there is no

reason why we should, and this recollection will at least have some little effect in our favour. We will likewise both take the comfort of what we know to be true, that the tumult will soon cease, and the pleasure long survive the pain, even as long I trust as we ourselves shall survive it.

What you say of Maty gives me all the consolation that you intended. We both think it highly probable that you suggest the true cause of his displeasure, when you suppose him mortified at not having had a part of the translation laid before him, ere the specimen was published. The General was very much hurt, and calls his censure harsh and unreasonable. He likewise sent me a consolatory letter on the occasion, in which he took the kindest pains to heal the wound that he supposed I might have suffered. I am not naturally insensible, and the sensibilities that I had by nature have been wonderfully enhanced by a long series of shocks, given to a frame of nerves that was never very athletic. I feel accordingly, whether painful or pleasant, in the extreme ; am easily elevated, and easily cast down. The frown of a critic freezes my poetical powers, and discourages me to a degree that makes me ashamed of my own weakness. Yet I presently recover my confidence again. The half of what you so kindly say in your last would at any time restore my spirits, and, being said by you, is infallible. I am not ashamed to confess, that having commenced an author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. *I have, (what, perhaps, you little suspect*

me of,) in my nature an infinite share of ambition. But with it I have at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence. To this combination of opposite qualities it has been owing that, till lately, I stole through life without undertaking any thing, yet always wishing to distinguish myself. At last I ventured, ventured too in the only path that at so late a period was yet open to me; and am determined, if God have not determined otherwise, to work my way through the obscurity that has been so long my portion into notice. Every thing therefore that seems to threaten this my favourite purpose with disappointment, affects me nearly. I suppose that all ambitious minds are in the same predicament. He who seeks distinction must be sensible of disapprobation, exactly in the same proportion as he desires applause. And now, my precious cousin, I have unfolded my heart to you in this particular, without a speck of dissimulation. Some people, and good people too, would blame me: but you will not; and they I think would blame without just cause. We certainly do not honour God when we bury, or when we neglect to improve, as far as we may, whatever talent he may have bestowed on us, whether it be little or much. In natural things, as well as in spiritual, it is a never-failing truth, that to him who *hath*, (that is, to him who occupies what he hath diligently, and so as to increase it,) more shall be given. Set me down therefore, my dear, for an industrious rhym^{er}, so long as I shall have the ability. For in this only way is it possible for me, so

far as I can see, either to honour God, or to serve man, or even to serve myself.

I rejoice to hear that Mr. Throckmorton wishes to be on a more intimate footing. I am shy, and suspect that he is not very much otherwise; and the consequence has been that we have mutually wished an acquaintance without being able to accomplish it. Blessings on you for the hint that you dropped on the subject of the house at Weston! For the burthen of my song is,—“Since we have met once again, let us never be separated, as we have been, more.”

W. C.

CLXIX

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

OLNEY, May 20, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

About three weeks since I met your sister Chester at Mr. Throckmorton's, and from her learned that you are at Blithfield, and in health. Upon the encouragement of this information it is that I write now; I should not otherwise have known with certainty where to find you, or have been equally free from the fear of unseasonable intrusion. May God be with you, my friend, and give you a just measure of submission to his will, the most effectual of all remedies for the evils of this changing scene. I doubt not that he has

granted you this blessing already, and may he still continue it !

Now I will talk a little about myself : for except myself, living in this *terrarum angulo*, what can I have to talk about ? In a scene of perfect tranquillity, and the profoundest silence, I am kicking up the dust of heroic narrative, and besieging Troy again. I told you that I had almost finished the translation of the *Iliad*, and I verily thought so ;—but I was never more mistaken. By the time when I had reached the end of the poem, the first book of my version was a twelve-month old. When I came to consider it, after having laid it by so long, it did not satisfy me. I set myself to mend it, and I did so. But still it appeared to me improvable, and that nothing would so effectually secure that point as to give the whole book a new translation. With the exception of very few lines I have so done, and was never in my life so convinced of the soundness of Horace's advice to publish nothing in haste ; so much advantage have I derived from doing that twice which I thought I had accomplished notably at once. He indeed recommends nine years' imprisonment of your verses before you send them abroad : but the ninth part of that time is I believe as much as there is need of to open a man's eyes upon his own defects, and to secure him from the danger of premature self-approbation. Neither ought it to be forgotten that nine years make so wide an interval between the cup and the lip, that a thousand things may fall out between. New engagements may

occur, which may make the finishing of that which a poet has begun impossible. In nine years he may rise into a situation, or he may sink into one utterly incompatible with his purpose. His constitution may break in nine years, and sickness may disqualify him for improving what he enterprised in the days of health. His inclination may change, and he may find some other employment more agreeable, or another poet may enter upon the same work, and get the start of him. Therefore, my friend Horace, though I acknowledge your principle to be good, I must confess that I think the practice you would ground upon it carried to an extreme. The rigour that I exercised upon the first book, I intend to exercise upon all that follow, and have now actually advanced into the middle of the seventh, no where admitting more than one line in fifty of the first translation. You must not imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth I had not; but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed if it does not call aloud for a second. You saw the specimen, and you saw, I am sure, one great fault in it: I mean the harshness of some of the elisions. I do not altogether take the blame of these to myself, for into some of them I was actually driven and hunted by a series of reiterated objections made by a critical friend, whose scruples and delicacies

teased me out of all my patience. But no such monsters will be found in the volume.

Your brother Chester has furnished me with Barnes's Homer, from whose notes I collect here and there some useful information, and whose fair and legible type preserves me from the danger of being as blind as was my author. I saw a sister of yours at Mr. Throckmorton's; but I am not good at making myself heard across a large room, and therefore nothing passed between us. I felt, however, that she was my friend's sister, and much esteemed her for your sake.—Ever yours, W. C.

P.S.—The swan is called *argutus* (I suppose) *a non arguendo*, and *canorus a non canendo*. But whether he be dumb or vocal, more poetical than the eagle or less, it is no matter. A feather of either, in token of your approbation and esteem, will never, you may rest assured, be an offence to me.

CLXX

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, May 25, 1786.

I have at length, my cousin, found my way into my summer abode. I believe that I described it to you some time since, and will therefore now leave it undescribed. I will only say that I am writing in a bandbox, situated, at least in my account, delightfully, because it

has a window in one side that opens into that orchard, through which, as I am sitting here, I shall see you often pass, and which therefore I already prefer to all the orchards in the world. You do well to prepare me for all possible delays, because in this life all sorts of disappointments are possible, and I shall do well, if any such delay of your journey should happen, to practise that lesson of patience which you inculcate. But it is a lesson which, even with you for my teacher, I shall be slow to learn. Being sure however that you will not procrastinate without cause, I will make myself as easy as I can about it, and hope the best. To convince you how much I am under discipline and good advice, I will lay aside a favourite measure, influenced in doing so by nothing but the good sense of your contrary opinion. I had set my heart on meeting you at Newport. In my haste to see you once again, I was willing to overlook many awkwardnesses I could not but foresee would attend it. I put them aside so long as I only foresaw them myself, but since I find that you foresee them too, I can no longer deal so slightly with them. It is therefore determined that we meet at Olney. Much I shall feel, but I will not die if I can help it, and I beg that you will take all possible care to outlive it likewise, for I know what it is to be balked in the moment of acquisition, and should be loath to know it again.

Last Monday, in the evening, we walked to Weston, according to our usual custom. It happened, owing to a mistake of time, that we set out half an hour sooner.

than usual. This mistake we discovered, while we were in the wilderness. So, finding that we had time before us, as they say, Mrs. Unwin proposed that we should go into the village, and take a view of the house that I had just mentioned to you. We did so, and found it such a one as in most respects would suit you well. But Moses Brown, our vicar, who, as I told you, is in his eighty-sixth year, is not bound to die for that reason. He said himself, when he was here last summer, that he should live ten years longer, and for aught that appears so he may; in which case, for the sake of its near neighbourhood to us, the vicarage has charms for me, that no other place can rival. But this, and a thousand things more, shall be talked over when you come.

We have been industriously cultivating our acquaintance with our Weston neighbours since I wrote last, and they on their part have been equally diligent in the same cause. I have a notion, that we shall all suit well. I see much in them both that I admire. You know perhaps that they are Catholics.

It is a delightful bundle of praise, my cousin, that you have sent me;—all jasmine and lavender. Whoever the lady is, she has evidently an admirable pen, and a cultivated mind. If a person reads, it is no matter in what language; and if the mind be informed, it is no matter whether that mind belongs to a man or a woman: the taste and the judgement will receive the benefit alike in both. Long before *The Task* was published, I made an experiment one day, being in a

frollicksome mood, upon my friend :—we were walking in the garden, and conversing on a subject similar to these lines,—

The few that pray at all, pray oft amiss,
And seeking grace to' improve the present good,
Would urge a wiser suit than asking more.

I repeated them, and said to him with an air of *non-chalance*, “Do you recollect those lines? I have seen them somewhere, where are they?” He put on a considering face, and after some deliberation replied, —“Oh, I will tell you where they must be ;—in the *Night Thoughts*.” I was glad my trial turned out so well, and did not undeceive him. I mention this occurrence only in confirmation of the letter-writer’s opinion ; but at the same time I do assure you, on the faith of an honest man, that I never in my life designed an imitation of Young, or of any other writer ; for mimicry is my abhorrence,—at least in poetry.

Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that both for your sake, since you make a point of it, and for my own, I will be as philosophically careful as possible that these fine nerves of mine shall not be beyond measure agitated when you arrive. In truth, there is much greater probability that they will be benefited, and greatly too. Joy of heart, from whatever occasion it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines ; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have even a lasting effect, of the most advantageous kind, upon them. You must not imagine neither, that I am on the whole in any great degree

subject to nervous affections. Occasionally I am, and have been these many years, much liable to dejection ; but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me ;—I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr. Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs. Unwin shall be my expositor.

Adieu, my beloved cousin ! God grant that our friendship which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated for ever !

For you must know that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom, in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be, yours for ever,

W. C.

CLXXI

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, May 29, 1786.

Thou dear, comfortable cousin, whose letters, among all that I receive, have this property peculiarly their own, that I expect them without trembling, and never find any thing in them that does not give me pleasure; for which therefore I would take nothing in exchange that the world could give me, save and except that for which I must exchange them soon, (and happy shall I be to do so,) your own company. That, indeed, is delayed a little too long; to my impatience at least it seems so, who find the spring, backward as it is, too forward, because many of its beauties will have faded before you will have an opportunity to see them. We took our customary walk yesterday in the wilderness at Weston, and saw, with regret, the laburnums, syringas, and guelder-roses, some of them blown, and others just upon the point of blowing, and could not help observing—all these will be gone before Lady Hesketh comes! Still however there will be roses, and jasmine, and honey-suckle, and shady walks, and cool alcoves, and you will partake them with us. But I want you to have a share of every thing that is delightful here, and cannot bear that the advance of the season should steal away a single pleasure before you can come to enjoy it.

Every day I think of you, and almost all the day long ; I will venture to say, that even *you* were never so expected in your life. I called last week at the Quaker's to see the furniture of your bed, the fame of which had reached me. It is, I assure you, superb, of printed cotton, and the subject classical. Every morning you will open your eyes on Phaeton kneeling to Apollo, and imploring his father to grant him the conduct of his chariot for a day. May your sleep be as sound as your bed will be sumptuous, and your nights at least will be well provided for.

I shall send up the sixth and seventh books of the *Iliad* shortly, and shall address them to you. You will forward them to the General. I long to show you my workshop, and to see you sitting on the opposite side of my table. We shall be as close packed as two wax figures in an old fashioned picture frame. I am writing in it now. It is the place in which I fabricate all my verse in summer time. I rose an hour sooner than usual this morning, that I might finish my sheet before breakfast, for I must write this day to the General.

The grass under my windows is all bespangled with dewdrops, and the birds are singing in the apple trees, among the blossoms. Never poet had a more commodious oratory in which to invoke his Muse.

I have made your heart ache too often, my poor dear cousin, with talking about my fits of dejection. Something has happened that has led me to the sub-

ject, or I would have mentioned them more sparingly. Do not suppose, or suspect that I treat you with reserve ; there is nothing in which I am concerned that you shall not be made acquainted with. But the tale is too long for a letter. I will only add, for your present satisfaction, that the cause is not exterior, that it is not within the reach of human aid, and that yet I have a hope myself, and Mrs. Unwin a strong persuasion of its removal. I am indeed even now, and have been for a considerable time, sensible of a change for the better, and expect, with good reason, a comfortable lift from you. Guess then, my beloved cousin, with what wishes I look forward to the time of your arrival, from whose coming I promise myself not only pleasure, but peace of mind,—at least an additional share of it. At present it is an uncertain and transient guest with me ; but the joy with which I shall see and converse with you at Olney, may perhaps make it an abiding one.

W. C.

CLXXII

To Lady Hesketh.

OLNEY, *June 4 and 5, 1786.*

Ah ! my cousin, you begin already to fear and quake. What a hero am I, compared with you ! I have no fears of *you* ; on the contrary am as bold as a lion. I wish that your carriage were even now at

the door. You should soon see with how much courage I would face you. But what cause have you for fear? Am I not your cousin, with whom you have wandered in the fields of Freemantle, and at Bevis's Mount? who used to read to you, laugh with you, till our sides have ached, at any thing, or nothing? And am I in these respects at all altered? You will not find me so; but just as ready to laugh, and to wander, as you ever knew me. A cloud perhaps may come over me now and then, for a few hours, but from clouds I was never exempted. And are not you the identical cousin with whom I have performed all these feats? The very Harriet whom I saw, for the first time, at De Grey's, in Norfolk Street? (It was on a Sunday, when you came with my uncle and aunt to drink tea there, and I had dined there, and was just going back to Westminster.) If these things are so, and I am sure that you cannot gainsay a syllable of them all, then this consequence follows; that I do not promise myself more pleasure from your company than I shall be sure to find. Then you are my cousin, in whom I always delighted, and in whom I doubt not that I shall delight even to my latest hour. But this wicked coach-maker has sunk my spirits. What a miserable thing it is to depend, in any degree, for the accomplishment of a wish, and that wish so fervent, on the punctuality of a creature who I suppose was never punctual in his life! Do tell him, my dear, in order to quicken him, that if he performs his promise, he shall make my coach when I want one,

and that if he performs it not, I will most assuredly employ some other man.

The Throckmortons sent a note to invite us to dinner; we went, and a very agreeable day we had. They made no fuss with us, which I was heartily glad to see, for where I give trouble I am sure that I cannot be welcome. Themselves, and their chaplain, and we, were all the party. After dinner we had much cheerful and pleasant talk, the particulars of which might not perhaps be so entertaining upon paper, therefore all but one I will omit, and that I will mention only because it will of itself be sufficient to give you an insight into their opinion on a very important subject,—their own religion. I happened to say that in all professions and trades mankind affected an air of mystery. Physicians, I observed, in particular, were objects of that remark, who persist in prescribing in Latin, many times no doubt to the hazard of a patient's life, through the ignorance of an apothecary. Mr. Throckmorton assented to what I said, and turning to his chaplain, to my infinite surprise observed to him, "*That is just as absurd as our praying in Latin.*" I could have hugged him for his liberality, and freedom from bigotry, but thought it rather more decent to let the matter pass without any visible notice. I therefore heard it with pleasure, and kept my pleasure to myself. The two ladies in the mean time were tête-à-tête in the drawing-room. Their conversation turned principally (as I afterwards learned from Mrs. Unwin) on a most delightful topic, viz. myself.

In the first place, Mrs. Throckmorton admired my book, from which she quoted by heart more than I could repeat, though I so lately wrote it.

In short, my dear, I cannot proceed to relate what she said of the book, and the book's author, for that abominable modesty that I cannot even yet get rid of. Let it suffice to say that you, who are disposed to love every body who speaks kindly of your cousin, will certainly love Mrs. Throckmorton, when you shall be told what she said of him ; and that you *will* be told is equally certain, because it depends on Mrs. Unwin, who will tell you many a good long story for me, that I am not able to tell for myself. I am however not at all in arrear to our neighbours in the matter of admiration and esteem, but the more I know them, the more I like them, and have nearly an affection for them both. I am delighted that *The Task* has so large a share of the approbation of your sensible Suffolk friend.

I received yesterday from the General another letter of T. S. An unknown auxiliary having started up in my behalf, I believe I shall leave the business of answering to him, having no leisure myself for controversy. He lies very open to a very effectual reply.

My dearest cousin, adieu ! I hope to write to you but once more before we meet. But oh ! this coach-maker, and oh ! this holiday week !—Yours, with impatient desire to see you,

W. C.

CLXXIII

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

OLNEY, June 9, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The little time that I can devote to any other purpose than that of poetry is as you may suppose stolen. Homer is urgent. Much is done, but much remains undone, and no schoolboy is more attentive to the performance of his daily task than I am. You will therefore excuse me if at present I am both unfrequent and short.

The paper tells me that the Chancellor has relapsed, and I am truly sorry to hear it. The first attack was dangerous, but a second must be more formidable still. It is not probable that I should ever hear from him again if he survive ; yet of the much that I should have felt for him, had our connexion never been interrupted, I still feel much. Every body will feel the loss of a man whose abilities have made him of such general importance.

I correspond again with Colman, and upon the most friendly footing, and find in his instance, and in some others, that an intimate intercourse, which has been only casually suspended, not forfeited on either side by outrage, is capable not only of revival, but improvement.

I had a letter some time since from your sister Fanny, that gave me great pleasure. Such notices

from old friends are always pleasant, and of such pleasures I have received many lately. They refresh the remembrance of early days, and make me young again. The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer,—

“To whom replied the Devil yard-long-tailed.”

There never was any thing more truly Grecian than that triple epithet, and were it possible to introduce it into either *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, I should certainly steal it. I am now flushed with expectation of Lady Hesketh, who spends the summer with us. We hope to see her next week. We have found admirable lodgings both for her and her suite, and a Quaker in this town, still more admirable than they, who, as if he loved her as much as I do, furnishes them for her with real elegance.

W. C.

CLXXIV

To Lady Hesketh.

June 12, 1786.

I am neither young nor superannuated, yet am I a child. When I had read your letter I grumbled:—not at you, my dearest cousin, for you are in no fault,

but at the whole generation of coach-makers, as you may suppose, and at yours in particular. I foresaw and foreknew that he would fail in his promise, and yet was disappointed ; was, in truth, no more prepared for what I expected with so much reason, than if I had not at all expected it. I grumbled till we went to dinner, and at intervals till we had dined ; and when dinner was over, with very little encouragement, I could actually have cried. And if I had, I should in truth have thought them tears as well bestowed as most that I have shed for many years. At first I numbered months, then weeks, then days, and was just beginning to number hours, and now I am thrown back to days again. My first speech was, after folding up your letter, (for I will honestly tell you all,) I am crazed with Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and St. Alban's, and Totteridge, and Hadley. When is she to set out ?—When is she to be here ? Do tell me, for perhaps, you understand it better than I. Why, says Mrs. Unwin, (with much more composure in her air than properly belonged to her, for she also had her feelings on the occasion,) she sets out to-morrow se'nnight, and will be here on the Wednesday after. And who knows that ? replied I ; will the coach-maker be at all more punctual in repairing the old carriage, than in making the new one ? For my part, I have no hope of seeing her this month ; and if it be possible, I will not think of it, lest I should be again disappointed. And to say the truth, my dear, though hours have passed since thus I said, and

I have had time for cooler consideration, the suspicion still sticks close to me, that more delays may happen. A philosopher would prepare himself for such an event, but I am no philosopher, at least when the comfort of seeing you is in question. I believe in my heart that there have been just as many true philosophers upon earth, as there have been men that have had little or no feeling, and not one more. Swift truly says—

Indifference clad in reason's guise,
All want of fortitude supplies.

When I wake in the night, I feel my spirits the lighter because you are coming. When I am not at Troy, I am either occupied in the recollection of a thousand passages of my past life, in which you were a partaker with me, or conversing about you with Mrs. Unwin. Thus my days and nights have been spent principally ever since you determined upon this journey, and especially, and almost without interruption from any other subject, since the time of your journey has seemed near at hand. While I despaired, as I did for many years, that I should ever see you more, I thought of you, indeed, and often, but with less solicitude. I used to say to myself; Providence has so ordered it, and it is my duty to submit. He has cast me at a distance from her, and from all whom I once knew. He did it, and not I; it is He who has chosen my situation for me. Have I not reason to be thankful that, since he designed me to pass a part of my life, and no inconsiderable one neither, in a state of the deepest melancholy, he appointed me a

friend in Mrs. Unwin, who should share all my sorrows with me, and watch over me in my helpless condition, night and day? What, and where had I been without her? Such considerations were sufficient to reconcile me at that time to perpetual separation even from you, because perpetual I supposed it must be, and without remedy. But now every hour of your absence seems long, for this very natural reason, because the same Providence has given me a hope that you will be present with me soon. A good that seems at an immeasurable distance, and that we cannot hope to reach, has therefore the less influence on our affections. But the same good brought nearer, made to appear practicable, promised to our hopes, and almost in possession, engages all our faculties and desires. All this is according to the natural and necessary course of things in the human heart; and the philosophy that would interfere with it, is folly at least, if not frenzy. A throne has at present but little sensible attraction for me. And why? Perhaps only because I know that should I break my heart with wishes for a throne, I should never reach one. But did I know assuredly that I should put on a crown to-morrow, perhaps I too should feel ambition, and account the interposing night tedious. The sum of the whole matter, my dear, is this: that this villanous coach-maker has mortified me monstrously, and that I tremble lest he should do so again. From you I have no fears. I see in your letter, and all the way through it, what pains you take to assure me and give me

comfort. I am and will be comforted for that very reason ; and will wait still other ten days with all the patience that I can muster. You, I know, will be punctual if you can, and that at least is matter of real consolation.

I approve altogether, my cousin beloved, of your sending your goods to the waggon on Saturday, and cookee by the coach on Tuesday. She will be here perhaps by four in the afternoon, at the latest by five, and will have quite time enough to find out all the cupboards and shelves in her department before you arrive. But I declare and protest that cookee shall sleep that night at our house, and get her breakfast here next morning. You will break her heart, child, if you send her into a strange house where she will find nothing that has life but the curate, who has not much neither. Servant he keeps none. A woman makes his bed, and after a fashion as they say, dresses his dinner, and then leaves him to his lucubrations. I do therefore insist on it, and so does Mrs. Unwin, that cookee shall be our guest for that time ; and from this we will not depart. I tell thee besides, that I shall be more glad to see her, than ever I was in my life to see one whom I never saw before. Guess why, if you can.

You must number your miles fifty-six instead of fifty-four. The fifty-sixth mile ends but a few yards beyond the vicarage. Soon after you shall have entered Olney, you will find an opening on your right hand. It is a lane that leads to your dwelling. There your coach may stop and set down Mrs. Eaton ; when

she has walked about forty yards she will spy a green gate and rails on her left hand ; and when she has opened the gate and reached the house-door, she will find herself at home. But we have another manoeuvre to play off upon you, and in which we positively will not be opposed, or if we are, it shall be to no purpose. I have an honest fellow that works in my garden, his name is Kitchener, and we call him Kitch for brevity. He is sober, and as trusty as the day. He has a smart blue coat, that when I had worn it some years, I gave him, and he has now worn it some years himself. I shall set him on horseback, and order him to the Swan at Newport, there to wait your arrival, and if you should not stop at that place, as perhaps you may not, immediately to throw himself into your suite, and to officiate as your guide. For though the way from Newport hither is short, there are turnings that might puzzle your coachman ; and he will be of use too, in conducting you to our house, which otherwise you might not easily find, partly through the stupidity of those of whom you might inquire, and partly from its out-of-the-way situation. My brother drove up and down Olney in quest of us, almost as often as you up and down Chancery Lane in quest of the Madans, with fifty boys and girls at his tail, before he could find us. The first man, therefore, you shall see in a blue coat with white buttons, in the famous town of Newport, cry Kitch ! He will immediately answer, My Lady ! and from that moment you are sure not to be lost.

Your house shall be as clean as scrubbing and dry-rubbing can make it, and in all respects fit to receive you. My friend the Quaker, in all that I have seen of his doings, has acquitted himself much to my satisfaction. Some little things, he says, will perhaps be missing at first, in such a multiplicity, but they shall be produced as soon as called for. Mrs. U. has bought you six ducks, and is fattening them for you. She has also rummaged up a coop that will hold six chickens, and designs to people it for you by the first opportunity; for these things are not to be got fit for the table at Olney. Thus, my dear, are all things in the best train possible, and nothing remains but that you come and show yourself. Oh, that moment! Shall we not both enjoy it?—That we shall.

I have received an anonymous complimentary Pindaric Ode from a little poet who calls himself a school-boy. I send you the first stanza by way of specimen. You shall see it all soon.

TO WM. COWPER, OF THE INNER TEMPLE, ESQ.

ON HIS POEMS IN THE SECOND VOLUME

In what high strains, my Muse, wilt thou
Attempt great Cowper's worth to show?

Pindaric strains shall tune the lyre,

And 'twould require

A Pindar's fire

To sing great Cowper's worth,

The lofty bard, delightful sage,

Ever the wonder of the age,

And *blessing to the earth.*

Adieu, my precious cousin, your lofty bard and

delightful sage expects you with all possible affection.
—Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

I am truly sorry for your poor friend Burrows!

Our dinner hour is four o'clock. We will not surfeit you with delicacies; of that be assured. I know your palate, and am glad to know that it is easily pleased. Were it other than it is, it would stand but a poor chance to be gratified at Olney. I undertake for lettuce and cucumber, and Mrs. U. for all the rest. If she feeds you too well, you must humble her.

CLXXV

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

OLNEY, June 19, 1786.

My dear cousin's arrival has, as it could not fail to do, made us happier than we ever were at Olney. Her great kindness in giving us her company is a cordial that I shall feel the effect of, not only while she is here, but while I live.

Olney will not be much longer the place of our habitation. At a village two miles distant we have hired a house of Mr. Throckmorton, a much better than we occupy at present, and yet not more expensive. It is situated very near to our most agreeable landlord, and his agreeable pleasure grounds. In him, and in his wife, we shall find such companions as will

always make the time pass pleasantly while they are in the country, and his grounds will afford us good air, and good walking room in the winter ; two advantages which we have not enjoyed at Olney, where I have no neighbour with whom I can converse, and where, seven months in the year, I have been imprisoned by dirty and impassable ways, till both my health and Mrs. Unwin's have suffered materially.

Homer is very importunate, and will not suffer me to spend half the time with my distinct friends that I would gladly give them.

W. C.

CLXXVI

To the Rev. William Unwin.

OLNEY, *July 3, 1786.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

After a long silence I begin again. A day given to my friends, is a day taken from Homer, but to such an interruption, now and then occurring, I have no objection. Lady Hesketh is, as you observe, arrived, and has been with us near a fortnight. She pleases every body, and is pleased in her turn with every thing she finds at Olney ; is always cheerful and sweet-tempered, and knows no pleasure equal to that of communicating pleasure to us, and to all around her. This disposition in her is the more comfortable, because it is not the humour of the day, a sudden

flash of benevolence and good spirits, occasioned merely by a change of scene ; but it is her natural turn, and has governed all her conduct ever since I knew her first. We are consequently happy in her society, and shall be happier still to have you to partake with us in our joy. I can now assure you that her complexion is not at all indebted to art, having seen a hundred times the most convincing proof of its authenticity, her colour fading, and glowing again alternately as the weather, or her own temperature has happened to affect it, while she has been sitting before me. I am fond of the sound of bells, but was never more pleased with those of Olney than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage (Lord Dartmouth excepted) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted with every thing that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me ; my spirits, instead of being greatly raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat, or rather melancholy throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years.

And now I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the

front of our abode, you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother dwelt in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purpose of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand. The bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to contain us, and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will I hope prove advantageous both to your mother and me in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds

in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. A pretty deal of new furniture will be wanted, especially chairs and beds, all which my kind cousin will provide, and fit up a parlour and a chamber for herself into the bargain. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven.

I have hardly left myself room for an answer to your queries concerning my friend John, and his studies. What the supplement of Hirtius is made of, I know not. We did not read it at Westminster. I should imagine it might be dispensed with. I should recommend the civil war of Cæsar, because he wrote it, who ranks I believe as the best writer, as well as soldier, of his day. There are books (I know not what they are, but you do, and can easily find them) that will inform him clearly of both the civil and military management of the Romans, the several officers, I mean, in both departments; and what was the peculiar province of each. The study of some such book would I should think prove a good introduction to that of Livy, unless you have a Livy with notes to that effect. A want of intelligence in those points has heretofore made the Roman history very dark and difficult to me; therefore I thus advise.

Our love is with all your lovelies, both great and small.—Yours ever,

W. C.

CLXXVII

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

OLNEY, July 4, 1786.

I rejoice, my dear friend, that you have at last received my proposals, and most cordially thank you for all your labours in my service. I have friends in the world who, knowing that I am apt to be careless when left to myself, are determined to watch over me with a jealous eye upon this occasion. The consequence will be, that the work will be better executed, but more tardy in the production. To them I owe it, that my translation, as fast as it proceeds, passes under a revisal of the most accurate discerners of all blemishes. I know not whether I told you before, or now tell you for the first time, that I am in the hands of a very extraordinary person.¹ He is intimate with my bookseller, and voluntarily offered his service. I was at first doubtful, whether to accept it or not; but finding that my friends abovesaid were not to be satisfied on any other terms, though myself a perfect stranger to the man and his qualifications, except as he was recommended by Johnson, I at

¹ Cowper's critic was the Swiss painter and writer on art, Henry Fuseli, who had resided in England for many years. See below, pp. 79, 88 *sq.*, 108 *sq.*

length consented, and have since found great reason to rejoice that I did. I called him an extraordinary person, and such he is ; for he is not only versed in Homer, and accurate in his knowledge of the Greek to a degree that entitles him to that appellation, but, though a foreigner, is a perfect master of our language, and has exquisite taste in English poetry. By his assistance I have improved many passages, supplied many oversights, and corrected many mistakes, such as will of course escape the most diligent and attentive labourer in such a work. I ought to add, because it affords the best assurance of his zeal and fidelity, that he does not toil for hire, nor will accept of any premium, but has entered on this business merely for his amusement. In the last instance my sheets will pass through the hands of our old schoolfellow Colman, who has engaged to correct the press, and make any little alterations that he may see expedient. With all this precaution, little as I intended it once, I am now well satisfied. Experience has convinced me that other eyes than my own are necessary, in order that so long and arduous a task may be finished as it ought, and may neither discredit me, nor mortify and disappoint my friends. You, who I know interest yourself much and deeply in my success, will I dare say be satisfied with it too. Pope had many aids, and he who follows Pope ought not to walk alone.

Though I announce myself by my very undertaking to be one of Homer's most enraptured admirers, I am not a blind one. Perhaps the speech of Achilles given

in my specimen is, as you hint, rather too much in the moralizing strain, to suit so young a man, and of so much fire. But whether it be or not, in the course of the close application that I am forced to give to my author, I discover inadvertencies not a few ; some perhaps that have escaped even the commentators themselves ; or perhaps, in the enthusiasm of their idolatry, they resolved that they should pass for beauties. Homer however, say what they will, was man, and in all the works of man, especially in a work of such length and variety, many things will of necessity occur, that might have been better. Pope and Addison had a Dennis ; and Dennis, if I mistake not, held up as he has been to scorn and detestation, was a sensible fellow, and passed some censures upon both those writers that, had they been less just, would have hurt them less. Homer had his Zoilus ; and perhaps if we knew all that Zoilus said, we should be forced to acknowledge that sometimes at least he had reason on his side. But it is dangerous to find any fault at all with what the world is determined to esteem faultless.

I rejoice, my dear friend, that you enjoy some composure, and cheerfulness of spirits : may God preserve and increase to you so great a blessing !—I am affectionately and truly yours,

W. C.

CLXXVIII

To the Rev. John Newton.

Aug. 5, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am neither idle nor forgetful ; on the contrary I think of you often, and my thoughts would more frequently find their way to my pen, were I not of necessity every day occupied in Homer. This long business engrosses all my mornings, and when the days grow shorter will have all my evenings too ; at present they are devoted to walking, an exercise to me as necessary as my food.

You have heard of our intended removal. The house that is to receive us is in a state of preparation, and, when finished, will be both smarter and more commodious than our present abode. But the circumstance that recommends it chiefly is its situation. Long confinement in the winter, and indeed for the most part in the autumn too, has hurt us both. A gravel walk, thirty yards long, affords but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty : yet it is all that we have had to move in for eight months in the year, during thirteen years that I have been a prisoner. Had I been confined in the Tower, the battlements of it would have furnished me with a larger space. You say well, that there was a time when I was happy at Olney ; and I am now as happy at Olney as I expect to be any where without the presence of God. Change

of situation is with me no otherwise an object than as both Mrs. Unwin's health and mine may happen to be concerned in it. A fever of the slow and spirit-oppressing kind seems to belong to all, except the natives, who have dwelt in Olney many years; and the natives have putrid fevers. Both they and we, I believe, are immediately indebted for our respective maladies to an atmosphere encumbered with raw vapours issuing from flooded meadows; and we in particular, perhaps, have fared the worse, for sitting so often, and sometime for months, over a cellar filled with water. These ills we shall escape in the uplands; and as we may reasonably hope, of course, their consequences. But as for happiness, he that has once had communion with his Maker must be more frantic than ever I was yet, if he can dream of finding it at a distance from Him. I no more expect happiness at Weston than here, or than I should expect it, in company with felons and outlaws, in the hold of a ballast-lighter. Animal spirits, however, have their value, and are especially desirable to him who is condemned to carry a burthen, which at any rate will tire him, but which, without their aid, cannot fail to crush him. The dealings of God with me are to myself utterly unintelligible. I have never met, either in books or in conversation, with an experience at all similar to my own. More than a twelvemonth has passed since I began to hope that, having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of this Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore, and I

prepared to sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed: those hopes have been blasted; those comforts have been wrested from me. I could not be so duped, even by the arch-enemy himself, as to be made to question the divine nature of them; but I have been made to believe, (which, you will say, is being duped still more,) that God gave them to me in derision, and took them away in vengeance. Such, however, is, and has been my persuasion many a long day; and when I shall think on that subject more comfortably, or, as you will be inclined to tell me, more rationally and scripturally, I know not. In the mean time, I embrace with alacrity every alleviation of my case, and with the more alacrity, because, whatsoever proves a relief of my distress, is a cordial to Mrs. Unwin, whose sympathy with me, through the whole of it, has been such, that, despair excepted, her burthen has been as heavy as mine. Lady Hesketh, by her affectionate behaviour, the cheerfulness of her conversation, and the constant sweetness of her temper, has cheered us both; and Mrs. Unwin not less than me. By her help we get change of air and of scene, though still resident at Olney; and by her means, have intercourse with some families in this country, with whom, but for her, we could never have been acquainted. Her presence here would, at any time, even in my happiest days, have been a comfort to me; but, in the present day, I am doubly sensible of its value. She leaves nothing unsaid, nothing undone, that she thinks will be con-

ducive to our well-being ; and, so far as she is concerned, I have nothing to wish, but that I could believe her sent hither in mercy to myself,—then I should be thankful.

I understand that Mr. Bull is in town. If you should see him and happen to remember it, be so good as to tell him that we called at his door yesterday evening. All were well, but Mrs. B. and Mr. Greatheed were both abroad.

I am, my dear friend, with Mrs. Unwin's love to Mrs. N. and yourself, hers and yours, as ever,

W. C.

CLXXIX

To the Rev. William Unwin.

August 24, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I catch a minute by the tail and hold it fast, while I write to you. The moment it is fled I must go to breakfast. The post that brought me your speculations on the subject of your future pupil, conveyed to you I suppose Lady Hesketh's letter on the same subject, which has no doubt given you satisfaction. I saw Mr. Hornby's letter, than which nothing could be more handsome. His sole remark on the matter of stipend is this,—that in placing the young gentleman under the influence of such excellent tuition, he confers on him a greater advantage than he could

secure to him by any other means. You see, therefore, that he is a wise man, knows how to value the opportunity, and that erudition, etc. are better than house and land ; for that

When house and land are gone and spent,
Then larning is most excellent.

I wish you all possible success with him, and that the Muses nine, with Apollo at their head, may brighten his intellects, and make him readily susceptible of all that you shall endeavour to infuse.

I am still occupied in refining and polishing, and shall this morning give the finishing hand to the seventh book. Fuseli does me the honour to say that the most difficult, and most interesting parts of the poem, are admirably rendered. But because he did not express himself equally pleased with the more pedestrian parts of it, my labour therefore has been principally given to the dignification of them ; not but that I have retouched considerably, and made better still, the best. In short I hope to make it all of a piece, and shall exert myself to the utmost to secure that desirable point. A storyteller, so very circumstantial as Homer, must of necessity present us often with much matter in itself capable of no other embellishment than purity of diction and harmony of versification can give to it. *Hic labor, hoc opus est.* For our language, unless it be very severely chastised, has not the terseness, nor our measure the music of the Greek. But I shall not fail through want of industry.

We are likely to be very happy in our connexion

with the Throckmortons. His reserve and mine wear off, and he talks with great pleasure of the comfort that he proposes to himself from our winter-evening conversations. His purpose seems to be, that we should spend them alternately with each other. Lady Hesketh transcribes for me at present. When she is gone, Mrs. Throckmorton takes up that business, and will be my lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter. She solicited herself that office.

I will subjoin the measure of my hat. Let the new one be furnished *à la mode*.—Believe me, my dear William, truly yours,

W. C.

Mr. Throckmorton will, I doubt not, procure Lord Petre's name, if he can, without any hint from me. He could not interest himself more in my success than he seems to do. Could he get the Pope to subscribe, I should have him; and should be glad of him and the whole conclave.

The outside circumference of the hat crown is two feet one inch and an eighth.

CLXXX

To the Rev. William Unwin.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You are my mahogany box, with a slip in the lid of it, to which I commit my productions of the lyric kind, in perfect confidence that there they are safe, and will

go no farther. All who are attached to the jingling art have this peculiarity, that they would find no pleasure in the exercise, had they not one friend at least to whom they might publish what they have composed. If you approve my Latin, and your wife and sister my English, this, together with the approbation of your mother, is fame enough for me.

He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle, I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a school-boy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally unacquainted with its contrary. No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do. I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes, as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties which, though they never existed, are more captivating than any that ever did ; accordingly I was a schoolboy in high favour with my master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form, for the admiration of all who were able to understand it. Do you wish to see this highly applauded performance ? It follows on the other side.

[Torn Off]

CLXXXI

To the Rev. William Unwin.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

You are sometimes indebted to bad weather, but more frequently to a dejected state of mind, for my punctuality as a correspondent. This was the case when I composed that tragi-comical ditty for which you thank me: my spirits were exceedingly low, and having no fool or jester at hand, I resolved to be my own. The end was answered; I laughed myself, and I made you laugh. Sometimes I pour out my thoughts in a mournful strain; but these sable effusions your mother will not suffer me to send you, being resolved that nobody shall share with me the burthen of my melancholy but herself. In general you may suppose that I am remarkably sad when I seem remarkably merry. The effort we make to get rid of a load is usually violent in proportion to the weight of it. I have seen at Sadler's Wells a tight little fellow dancing with a fat man upon his shoulders; to those who looked at him, he seemed insensible of the encumbrance; but if a physician had felt his pulse, when the feat was over, I suppose he would have found the effect of it there. Perhaps you remember the Undertakers' dance in the *Rehearsal*, which they perform in crape hat-bands and black cloaks, to the tune of "Hob or Nob," one of the sprightliest airs in the world. Such is my fiddling, and such is my dancing; but they serve a purpose

which at some certain times could not be so effectually promoted by any thing else. . . .

I have endeavoured to comply with your request, though I am not good at writing upon a given subject. Your mother, however, comforts me by her approbation, and I steer myself in all that I produce by her judgement. If she does not understand me at the first reading, I am sure the lines are obscure, and always alter them; if she laughs, I know it is not without reason; and if she says, "that's well, it will do"—I have no fear lest any body else should find fault with it. She is my lord chamberlain, who licenses all I write.

TO MISS C——, ON HER BIRTH-DAY.

How many between east and west,
Disgrace their parent earth,
Whose days constrain us to detest
The day that gave them birth!

Not so when Stella's natal morn
Revolving months restore,
We can rejoice that she was born,
And wish her born once more!

If you like it, use it: if not, you know the remedy. It is serious, yet epigrammatic,—like a bishop at a ball!

W. C.

P.S. I have read the *Review*¹; it is learned and wise,
Clean, candid, and witty,—*Thelyphthora* dies.

¹ A reply to Madan's *Thelyphthora* in the *Monthly Review*. As to *Thelyphthora*, see above, vol. i. p. 48, note.

CLXXXII

To the Rev. William Unwin.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

How apt we are to deceive ourselves where self is in question ! you say I am in your debt, and I accounted you in mine ; a mistake to which you must attribute my arrears, if indeed I owe you any, for I am not backward to write where the uppermost thought is welcome.

I am obliged to you for all the books you have occasionally furnished me with : I did not indeed read many of Johnson's Classics ; those of established reputation are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again : and as to the minor Classics, I did not think them worth reading at all ;—I tasted most of them, and did not like them. It is a great thing to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century. Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved the name of poet : I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first. The pitiful scribbler of his life seems to have undertaken that task, for which he was entirely unqualified, merely because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him. He has inserted in it but one anecdote of consequence, for which he refers you to a novel, and introduces the story with

doubts about the truth of it. But his barrenness as a biographer I could forgive, if the simpleton had not thought himself a judge of his writings, and under the erroneous influence of that thought, informed his reader that *Gotham*, *Independence*, and *The Times*, were catchpennies. *Gotham*, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which I make no doubt the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance, (and Dryden in his *Absalom and Achitophel* stands in need of the same indulgence,) for an unwarrantable use of Scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance. *Independence* is a most animated piece, full of strength and spirit, and marked with that bold masculine character which, I think, is the great peculiarity of this writer. And *The Times*, (except that the subject is disgusting to the last degree,) stands equally high in my opinion. He is indeed a careless writer for the most part; but where shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ventured upon and so happily finished, the matter so compressed and yet so clear, and the colouring so sparingly laid on, and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise that he is never guilty of those faults as a writer, which he lays to the charge of others. A proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics, but that he was qualified to

do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much, and so fast, would through inadvertency and hurry unavoidably have departed from rules which he might have found in books, but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err. A race-horse is graceful in his swiftest pace, and never makes an awkward motion though he is pushed to his utmost speed. A cart-horse might perhaps be taught to play tricks in the riding-school, and might prance and curvet like his betters, but at some unlucky time would be sure to betray the baseness of his original. It is an affair of very little consequence perhaps to the well-being of mankind, but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph :

*“ Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
Esse sinent.”*

—Yours,

W. C.

CLXXXIII

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

OLNEY, Aug. 31, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I began to fear for your health, and every day said to myself,—I must write to Bagot soon, if it be only to ask him how he does,—a measure that I should

certainly have pursued long since had I been less absorbed in Homer than I am. But such are my engagements in that quarter, that they make me, I think, good for little else.

Many thanks, my friend, for the names that you have sent me. The Bagots will make a most conspicuous figure among my subscribers, and I shall not, I hope, soon forget my obligations to them.

The unacquaintedness of modern ears with the divine harmony of Milton's numbers, and the principles upon which he constructed them, is the cause of the quarrel that they have with elisions in blank verse. But where is the remedy? In vain should you or I, and a few hundreds more perhaps who have studied his versification, tell them of the superior majesty of it, and that for that majesty it is greatly indebted to those elisions. In their ears, they are discord and dissonance; they lengthen the line beyond its due limits, and are therefore not to be endured. There is a whimsical inconsistency in the judgement of modern readers in this particular. Ask them all round, whom do you account the best writer of blank verse? and they will reply to a man, Milton, to be sure; Milton against the field! Yet if a writer of the present day should construct his numbers exactly upon Milton's plan, not one in fifty of these professed admirers of Milton would endure him. The case standing thus, what is to be done? An author must either be contented to give disgust to the generality, or he must humour them by sinning against his own judgement.

This latter course, so far as elisions are concerned, I have adopted as essential to my success. In every other respect I give as much variety in my measure as I can, I believe I may say as in ten syllables it is possible to give, shifting perpetually the pause and cadence, and accounting myself happy that modern refinement has not yet enacted laws against this also. If it had, I protest to you I would have dropped my design of translating Homer entirely; and with what an indignant stateliness of reluctance I make them the concession that I have mentioned, Mrs. Unwin can witness, who hears all my complaints upon the subject.

After having lived twenty years at Olney, we are on the point of leaving it, but shall not migrate far. We have taken a house in the village of Weston. Lady Hesketh is our good angel, by whose aid we are enabled to pass into a better air, and a more walkable country. The imprisonment that we have suffered here for so many winters has hurt us both. That we may suffer it no longer, she stoops to Olney, lifts us from our swamp, and sets us down on the elevated grounds of Weston Underwood. There, my dear friend, I shall be happy to see you, and to thank you in person for all your kindness.

I do not wonder at the judgement that you form of Fuseli, a foreigner; but you may assure yourself that, foreigner as he is, he has an exquisite taste in English verse. The man is all fire, and an enthusiast in the highest degree on the subject of Homer, and has given me more than once a jog, when I have been

inclined to nap with my author. No cold water is to be feared from him that might abate my own fire, rather perhaps too much combustible.—Adieu ! *mon ami*, yours faithfully,

W. C.

CLXXXIV

To the Rev. William Unwin.

OLNEY, Sept. 24, 1786.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

So interesting a concern as your tutorship of the young gentleman in question cannot have been so long in a state of indecision without costing you much anxiety. We have sympathised with you under it all, but are glad to be informed that the long delay is not chargeable upon Mr. Hornby. Bishops are *κακα θηρια, γαστερες αργοι*.—You have heard, I know, from Lady Hesketh, and she has exculpated me from all imputation of wilful silence, from which, indeed, of yourself you are so good as to discharge me, in consideration of my present almost endless labour. I have nothing to say in particular on the subject of Homer, except that I am daily advancing in the work with all the dispatch that a due concern for my own credit in the result will allow.

You have had your troubles, and we ours. This day three weeks your mother received a letter from Mr. Newton, which she has not yet answered, nor is

likely to answer hereafter. It gave us both much concern, but her more than me; I suppose because my mind being necessarily occupied in my work, I had not so much leisure to browse upon the wormwood that it contained. The purport of it is a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the Gospel. That many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that he never so much doubted of my restoration to Christian privileges as now;—in short, that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so. He concludes with putting your mother in mind that there is still an intercourse between London and Olney; by which he means to insinuate that we cannot offend against the decorum that we are bound to observe, but the news of it will most certainly be conveyed to him. We do not at all doubt it;—we never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer; and though we do not wonder to find ourselves made the subjects of false accusation in a place ever fruitful of such productions, we do and must wonder a little, that he should listen to them with so much credulity. I say this, because if he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I think, have found either me censurable or your mother. And that *she* should be suspected of irregularities is the more wonderful, (for wonderful it would be at any rate,) because she sent him not long before a letter

conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality as ought to have convinced him that she at least was no wanderer. But what is the fact, and how do we spend our [time] in reality? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them. That we visit also at Gayhurst; that we have frequently taken airings with my cousin in her carriage; and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening and sometimes by myself, which however your mother has never done. These are the only novelties in our practice; and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found any where. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick;—except indeed that, by her great kindness, she has given us a little lift in point of condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

My dear William, I do not know that I should have teased your nerves and spirits with this disagreeable theme, had not Mr. Newton talked of applying to you for particulars. He would have done it, he says, when he saw you last, but had not time. You are now qualified to inform him as minutely as we ourselves could of all our enormities! Adieu!—Our sincerest love to yourself and yours,

WM. C.

CLXXXV

To the Rev. John Newton.

Sept. 30, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

No length of separation will ever make us indifferent either to your pleasures or your pains. We rejoice that you have had so agreeable a jaunt, and (excepting Mrs. Newton's terrible fall, from which, however, we are happy to find that she received so little injury,) a safe return. We, who live always encompassed by rural scenery, can afford to be stationary; though we ourselves, were I not too closely engaged with Homer, should perhaps follow your example, and seek a little refreshment from variety and change of place,—a course that we might find not only agreeable, but, after a sameness of thirteen years, perhaps useful. You must, undoubtedly, have found your excursion beneficial, who at all other times endure, if not so close a confine-

ment as we, yet a more unhealthy one, in city air and in the centre of continual engagements.

Your letter to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct and the offence taken at it in our neighbourhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; and she is still deeply affected by it. Of this you may assure yourself, that if our friends in London have been grieved, they have been misinformed; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports; and that if any of our serious neighbours have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behaviour of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which, in fact it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's, and at Gayhurst; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance: more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Beaujeat turnpike and back again; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more.

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question,—which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connexions; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them; and that St. Paul himself, conducted to them as we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done. It is always impossible to conjecture, to much purpose, from the beginnings of a providence, in what it will terminate. If we have neither received nor communicated any spiritual good at present, while conversant with our new acquaintance, at least no harm has befallen on either side; and it were too hazardous an assertion even for our censorious neighbours to make, that, because the cause of the Gospel does not appear to have been served at present, therefore it never can be in any future intercourse that we may have with them. In the mean time I speak a strict truth, and as in the sight of God, when I say that we are neither of us at all more addicted to gadding than heretofore. We both naturally love seclusion from company, and never go into it without putting a force upon our disposition; at the same time I will confess, and you will easily conceive, that the melancholy incident to such close confinement as we have so long endured, finds

itself a little relieved by such amusements as a society so innocent affords. You may look round the Christian world, and find few, I believe, of our station, who have so little intercourse as we with the world that is not Christian.

We place all the uneasiness that you have felt for us upon this subject, to the account of that cordial friendship of which you have long given us proof. But you may be assured, that notwithstanding all rumours to the contrary, we are exactly what we were when you saw us last ;—I, miserable on account of God's departure from me, which I believe to be final ; and she, seeking his return to me in the path of duty, and by continual prayer.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CLXXXVI

To the Rev. William Unwin.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

The fish happening to swim uppermost in my mind, I give it the precedence, and begin with returning our thanks for it, not forgetting the circumstance of free carriage. Upon the whole, I think this a handsomer way of acknowledging a present than to tuck it into a postscript.

I find the *Register* in all respects an entertaining medley ; but especially in this, that it has brought to my view some long forgotten pieces of my own pro-

duction ;—I mean by the way two or three. These I have marked with my own initials, and you may be sure I found them peculiarly agreeable, as they had not only the grace of being mine, but that of novelty likewise to recommend them. It is at least twenty years since I saw them. You, I think, was never a dabbler in rhyme. I have been one ever since I was fourteen years of age, when I began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. I have no more right to the name of a poet, than a maker of mouse-traps has to that of an engineer ; but my little exploits in this way have at times amused me so much, that I have often wished myself a good one. Such a talent in verse as mine is like a child's rattle,—very entertaining to the trifler that uses it, and very disagreeable to all beside. But it has served to rid me of some melancholy moments, for I only take it up as a gentleman performer does his fiddle. I have this peculiarity belonging to me as a rhymist, that though I am charmed to a great degree with my own work, while it is on the anvil, I can seldom bear to look at it when it is once finished. The more I contemplate it, the more it loses of its value, till I am at last quite disgusted with it. I then throw it by, take it up again perhaps ten years after, and am as much delighted with it as at first.

Few people have the art of being agreeable when they talk of themselves ; if you are not weary therefore by this time you pay me a high compliment.

I dare say Miss S—— was much diverted with the conjecture of her friends. The true key to the pleasure

she found at Olney was plain enough to be seen, but they chose to overlook it. She brought with her a disposition to be pleased, which whoever does is sure to find a visit agreeable, because they make it so.

—Yours,

W. C.

LETTERS FROM WESTON UNDER-
WOOD

1786—1794

CLXXXVII

To the Rev. John Newton.

WESTON UNDERWOOD, *Nov.* 17, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

My usual time of answering your letters having been unavoidably engrossed by occasions that would not be thrust aside, I have been obliged to postpone the payment of my debt for a whole week. Even now it is not without some difficulty that I discharge it ; which you will easily believe, when I tell you that this is only the second day that has seen us inhabitants of our new abode. When God speaks to a chaos, it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment ; but when his creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labour and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to

furniture of all kinds, however convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonized. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, in the evening, Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene, that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God; but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of his absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting. What consequences are to attend our removal, God only knows. I know well that it is not in situation to effect a cure of melancholy like mine. The change, however, has been entirely a providential one; for

much as I wished it, I never uttered that wish, except to Mrs. Unwin. When I learned that the house was to be let, and had seen it, I had a strong desire that Lady Hesketh should take it for herself, if she should happen to like the country. That desire, indeed, is not exactly fulfilled; and yet, upon the whole, is exceeded. We are the tenants; but she assures us that we shall often have her for a guest; and here is room enough for us all. You, I hope, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton, will want no assurances to convince you that you will always be received here with the sincerest welcome. More welcome than you have been, you cannot be; but better accommodated you may and will be.

I have not proceeded thus far without many interruptions, and though my paper is small, shall be obliged to make my letter still smaller. Our own removal is I believe the only news of Olney. Concerning this you will hear much, and much I doubt not that will have no truth in it. It is already reported there, and has been indeed for some time, that I am turned Papist. You will know how to treat a lie like this which proves nothing but the malignity of its author; but other tales you may possibly hear that will not so readily refute themselves. This, however, I trust you will always find true, that neither Mrs. Unwin nor myself shall have so conducted ourselves in our new neighbourhood, as that you shall have any occasion to be grieved on our account.

Mr. Unwin has been ill of a fever at Winchester, but by a letter from Mr. Thornton we learn that he is recovering, and hopes soon to travel. His Mrs. Unwin has joined him at that place.

Adieu, my dear friend. Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances and mine conclude me ever yours,

W. C.

CLXXXVIII

To Lady Hesketh.

WESTON LODGE, Nov. 26, 1786.

It is my birthday, my beloved cousin, and I determine to employ a part of it, that it may not be destitute of festivity, in writing to you. The dark, thick fog that has obscured it, would have been a burthen to me at Olney, but here I have hardly attended to it. The neatness and snugness of our abode compensate all the dreariness of the season, and whether the ways are wet or dry, our house at least is always warm and commodious. Oh for you, my cousin, to partake these comforts with us! I will not begin already to tease you upon that subject, but Mrs. Unwin remembers to have heard from your own lips, that you hate London in the spring. Perhaps therefore by that time, you may be glad to escape from a scene which will be every day growing more disagreeable, that you may enjoy the comforts of the lodge. You well know that the best house has a desolate appearance

unfurnished. This house accordingly, since it has been occupied by us and our *meubles*, is as much superior to what it was when you saw it, as you can imagine. The parlour is even elegant. When I say that the parlour is elegant, I do not mean to insinuate that the study is not so. It is neat, warm, and silent, and a much better study than I deserve, if I do not produce in it an incomparable translation of Homer. I think every day of those lines of Milton, and congratulate myself on having obtained, before I am quite superannuated, what he seems not to have hoped for sooner :

“ And may at length my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage ! ”

For if it is not an hermitage, at least it is a much better thing ; and you must always understand, my dear, that when poets talk of cottages, hermitages, and such like things, they mean a house with six sashes in front, two comfortable parlours, a smart stair-case, and three bedchambers of convenient dimensions ; in short, exactly such a house as this.

The Throckmortons continue the most obliging neighbours in the world. One morning last week, they both went with me to the cliff ;—a scene, my dear, in which you would delight beyond measure, but which you cannot visit except in the spring or autumn. The heat of summer, and the clinging dirt of winter would destroy you. What is called the cliff, is no cliff, nor at all like one, but a beautiful terrace, sloping gently down to the Ouse, and from the brow of which, though not lofty, you have a view of such a

valley as makes that which you see from the hills near Olney, and which I have had the honour to celebrate, an affair of no consideration.

Wintry as the weather is, do not suspect that it confines me. I ramble daily, and every day change my ramble. Wherever I go, I find short grass under my feet, and when I have travelled perhaps five miles, come home with shoes not at all too dirty for a drawing-room. I was pacing yesterday under the elms, that surround the field in which stands the great alcove, when lifting my eyes I saw two black genteel figures bolt through a hedge into the path where I was walking. You guess already who they were, and that they could be nobody but our neighbours. They had seen me from a hill at a distance, and had traversed a great turnip-field to get at me. You see therefore, my dear, that I am in some request. Alas! in too much request with some people. The verses of Cadwallader have found me at last.

I am charmed with your account of our little cousin at Kensington. If the world does not spoil him hereafter, he will be a valuable man.—Good night, and may God bless thee.

W. C.

CLXXXIX

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Dec. 4, 1786.

I sent you, my dear, a melancholy letter, and I do

not know that I shall now send you one very unlike it. Not that any thing occurs in consequence of our late loss more afflictive than was to be expected, but the mind does not perfectly recover its tone after a shock like that which has been felt so lately. This I observe, that though my experience has long since taught me, that this world is a world of shadows, and that it is the more prudent, as well as the more Christian course to possess the comforts that we find in it, as if we possessed them not, it is no easy matter to reduce this doctrine into practice. We forget that that God who gave them, may, when he pleases, take them away; and that perhaps it may please him to take them at a time when we least expect, or are least disposed to part from them. Thus it has happened in the present case. There never was a moment in Unwin's life, when there seemed to be more urgent want of him than the moment in which he died. He had attained to an age when, if they are at any time useful, men become useful to their families, their friends, and the world. His parish began to feel, and to be sensible of the advantages of his ministry. The clergy around him were many of them awed by his example. His children were thriving under his own tuition and management, and his eldest boy is likely to feel his loss severely, being by his years in some respect qualified to understand the value of such a parent; by his literary proficiency too clever for a schoolboy, and too young at the same time for the university. The removal of a man in the prime of life of such a

character, and with such connexions, seems to make a void in society that can never be filled. God seemed to have made him just what he was, that he might be a blessing to others, and when the influence of his character and abilities began to be felt, removed him. These are mysteries, my dear, that we cannot contemplate without astonishment, but which will nevertheless be explained hereafter, and must in the mean time be revered in silence. It is well for his mother, that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence, else I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne. She derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought that he lived the life, and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin ! the first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St. Alban's, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more.

W. C.

CXC

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

WESTON, Dec. 9, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We had just begun to enjoy the pleasantness of our new situation, to find at least as much comfort in it as the season of the year would permit, when affliction found us out in our retreat, and the news reached us of the death of Mr. Unwin. He had taken a western tour with Mr. Henry Thornton, and in his return, at Winchester, was seized with a putrid fever, which sent him to his grave. He is gone to it, however, though young, as fit for it as age itself could have made him; regretted indeed, and always to be regretted by those who knew him, for he had every thing that makes a man valuable both in his principles and in his manners, but leaving still this consolation to his surviving friends, that he was desirable in this world chiefly because he was so well prepared for a better.

I find myself here situated exactly to my mind. Weston is one of the prettiest villages in England, and the walks about it at all seasons of the year delightful. I know that you will rejoice with me in the change that we have made, and for which I am altogether indebted to Lady Hesketh. It is a change as great as (to compare metropolitan things with rural) from St. Giles's to Grosvenor Square. Our house

is in all respects commodious, and in some degree elegant ; and I cannot give you a better idea of that which we have left, than by telling you the present candidates for it are a publican and a shoemaker.

W. C.

CXCI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Dec. 11, 1786.

Shenstone, my dearest cousin, in his commentary on the vulgar adage which says, Second thoughts are best, observes that the *third* thought generally resolves itself into the *first*. Thus it has happened to me. My first thought was to effect a transposition of the old glasses into the new frame ; my second, that perhaps that both the old glasses and the new frame might be broken in the experiment ; and my third, nevertheless, to make the trial. Accordingly I walked down to Olney this day, referred the matter to the watchmaker's consideration, and he has succeeded in the attempt to a wonder. I am at this moment peering through the same medium as usual, but with the advantage of a more ornamental mounting. I conjecture, by the way, from a passage in your note that accompanied the parcel, that I am indebted not *only* to you for this new accession to my elegant accommodations, but to some kind Incognito like-

wise ; I beg that you will present my thanks accordingly. The clerk of the parish has made me a new pair of straps to my buckles ; and the gingerbread, by its genial warmth, has delivered me since dinner from a distension of stomach that was immoderately troublesome, so that I am the better for you, my dear, from head to foot. Long time I in vain endeavoured to make myself master of the lamp, and was obliged at last to call in William to my assistance. Now there are certain things which great geniuses miss, and which men born without any understanding at all hit immediately. In justification of the truth of this remark, William, who is a lump of dough, who never can be more dead than he is till he has been buried a month, explained it to *me* in a moment ; accordingly we have used it twice, to my great satisfaction.

I sent Fuseli a hare by the coach that went up this morning, and certainly no man could better deserve it, though it was one of the largest that ever was seen. I could not resist the impulse that I felt to acknowledge my obligations to his critical exertions ; and yet shall be sorry that I complied with it, if in consequence of my civility he should become at all less rigorous in his demands, or less severe in his animadversions. I am on the point of finishing the correction of the ninth book, which I have now adjusted to two sheets filled with his strictures. He observes at the close of them, that to execute a translation of this book in particular, with felicity, appears

to him a prodigious task. He considers it, and I think justly, as one of the most consummate efforts of genius handed down to us from antiquity, and calls upon me for my utmost exertions. I have not failed to make them, with what success will be seen hereafter; but of this I am sure, that I have much improved it. The good-natured Padre of the Hall has offered me, in Mrs. Throckmorton's absence, his transcribing assistance, of which I shall avail myself, and deliver over to him the book in question in a day or two.

Mr. Chester paid me a morning visit about the middle of last week. He was, though a man naturally reserved, chatty and good humoured on the occasion, and when he took leave begged that I would not put myself to inconvenience for the sake of returning his visit with a punctilious alacrity in this wet and dirty season:—an allowance for which I was obliged to him, for since we now live five miles asunder, and I never ride, it does not at present occur to me by what means I could possibly get at him.

Our old house is not yet tenanted, but there are candidates for it. They are two who would divide the building between them—a shoemaker, and the ale-monger at the Horse and Groom. The carpenter in the mean time has assured Mr. Smith, the landlord, that unless it be well propped, and speedily, it will infallibly fall. Thank you, my dear, for saving our poor noddles from such imminent danger.

I learned to-day, at the Bull, that the liquors which

the General has sent me I may expect to see here to-morrow ; there are four hampers of sherry, and one of brandy and rum. The looking-glass which you destined to the study,—that, I mean, which came out of your chamber at the vicarage,—we have ventured to put up in the parlour. It is quite large enough, and makes a very smart appearance. The other, which you may remember to have seen in my chamber at Olney, we have transferred to Nibbs, who, being paid for a new frame, is to furnish us with a new glass for it.

What course have you taken with our friend Arnott? Has Lord Cowper discovered any intentions to perform the part of a Mæcenās toward me, or did he leave England forgetful that there was so important a character in it as myself? His little boy, I hope, has recovered. It would grieve me if the family should lose so much generosity as seems to be included in that small bosom.

The cloud that I mentioned to you, my cousin, has passed away, or perhaps the skirts of it may still hang over me. I feel myself, however, tolerably brisk, and tell you so because I know you will be glad to hear it. The grinners at *John Gilpin* little dream what the author sometimes suffers. How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it! May God bless thee, my dear! Adieu.—Ever yours,

W. C.

Soon after this reaches you, we hope that you

will receive a turkey. It was Mrs. Throckmorton's legacy to us when she went. It never had the honour to be crammed, for she crams none, but perhaps may not be the worse in flavour on that account. She fed it daily with her own hand.

CXCII

To Lady Hesketh.

WESTON, Dec. 21, 1786.

Your welcome letter, my beloved cousin, which ought by the date to have arrived on Sunday, being by some untoward accident delayed, came not till yesterday. It came however, and has relieved me from a thousand distressing apprehensions on your account.

The dew of your intelligence has refreshed my poetical laurels. A little praise now and then is very good for your hard-working poet, who is apt to grow languid, and perhaps careless without it. Praise I find affects us as money does. The more a man gets of it, with the more vigilance he watches over and preserves it. Such at least is its effect on me, and you may assure yourself that I will never lose a mite of it for want of care.

I have already invited the good Padre in general terms, and he shall positively dine here next week, whether he will or not. I do not at all suspect that

his kindness to Protestants has any thing insidious in it, any more than I suspect that he transcribes Homer for me with a view for my conversion. He would find me a tough piece of business I can tell him; for when I had no religion at all, I had yet a terrible dread of the Pope. How much more now!

I should have sent you a longer letter, but was obliged to devote my last evening to the melancholy employment of composing a Latin inscription for the tomb-stone of poor William, two copies of which I wrote out and enclosed, one to Henry Thornton, and one to Mr. Newton. Homer stands by me biting his thumbs, and swears that if I do not leave off directly, he will choke me with bristly Greek, that shall stick in my throat for ever.

W. C.

CXCIII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Dec. 24, 1786.

You must by no means, my dearest coz, pursue the plan that has suggested itself to you on the supposed loss of your letter. In the first place I choose that my Sundays, like the Sundays of other people, shall be distinguished by something that shall make me look forward to them with agreeable expectation, and for that reason desire that they may always bring me a letter from you. In the next place, if I know when

to *expect* a letter, I know likewise when to *enquire after* a letter, if it happens not to come; a circumstance of some importance; considering how excessively careless they are at the Swan, where letters are sometimes overlooked, and do not arrive at their destination, if no inquiry be made, till some days have passed after their arrival at Olney. It has happened frequently to me to receive a letter long after all the rest have been delivered, and the Padre assured me that Mr. Throckmorton has sent notes three several times to Mrs. Marriot, complaining of this neglect. For these reasons, my dear, thou must write still on Saturdays, and as often on other days as thou pleasest.

The screens came safe, and one of them is at this moment interposed between me and the fire, much to the comfort of my peepers. The other of them being fitted up with a screw that was useless, I have consigned to proper hands, that it may be made as serviceable as its brother. They are very neat, and I account them a great acquisition. Our carpenter assures me that the lameness of the chairs was not owing to any injury received in their journey, but that the maker never properly finished them. They were not high when they came, and in order to reduce them to a level, we have lowered them an inch. Thou knowest, child, that the short foot could not be lengthened, for which reason we shortened the long ones. The box containing the plate and the brooms reached us yesterday, and nothing had suffered the least damage by the way. Every thing

is smart, every thing is elegant, and we admire them all. The short candlesticks are short enough. I am now writing with those upon the table; Mrs. U. is reading opposite, and they suit us both exactly. With the money that you have in hand, you may purchase, my dear, at your most convenient time, a tea-urn; that which we have at present having never been handsome, and being now old and patched. A parson once, as he walked across the parlour, pushed it down with his belly, and it never perfectly recovered itself. We want likewise a tea-waiter, meaning, if you please, such a one as you may remember to have seen at the Hall, a wooden one. To which you may add, from the same fund, three or four yards of yard-wide muslin, wherewithal to make neckcloths for my worship. If after all these disbursements any thing should be left in the bottom of the purse, we shall be obliged to you if you will expend it in the purchase of silk pocket-handkerchiefs. There, my precious—I think I have charged thee with commissions in plenty.

You neither must nor shall deny us the pleasure of sending to you such small matters as we do. As to the partridges, you may recollect possibly, when I remind you of it, that I never eat them; they refuse to pass my stomach; and Mrs. Unwin rejoiced in receiving them only because she could pack them away to you—therefore never lay us under any embargoes of this kind, for I tell you beforehand, that we are both incorrigible. My beloved cousin,

the first thing I open my eyes upon in a morning, is it not the bed in which you have laid me? Did you not, in our old dismal parlour at Olney, give me the tea on which I breakfast?—the chocolate that I drink at noon, and the table at which I dine?—the every thing, in short, that I possess in the shape of convenience, is it not all from you? and is it possible, think you, that we should either of us overlook an opportunity of making such a tiny acknowledgement of your kindness? Assure yourself that never, while my name is Giles Gingerbread, will I dishonour my glorious ancestry, and my illustrious appellation, by so unworthy a conduct. I love you at my heart, and so does Mrs. U., and we must say thank you, and send you a peppercorn when we can. So thank you, my dear, for the brawn and the chine, and for all the good things that you announce, and at present I will, for your sake, say no more of thanksgiving. . . .—I am, my dearest, your most Gingerbread Giles, &c.

WM. COWPER.

CXCIV

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON, Jan. 3, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You wish to hear from me at any calm interval of epic frenzy. An interval presents itself, but whether calm or not, is perhaps doubtful. Is it possible for a

man to be calm, who for three weeks past has been perpetually occupied in slaughter,—letting out one man's bowels, smiting another through the gullet, transfixing the liver of another, and lodging an arrow in the buttock of a fourth? Read the thirteenth book of the *Iliad*, and you will find such amusing incidents as these the subject of it, the sole subject. In order to interest myself in it, and to catch the spirit of it, I had need discard all humanity. It is woeful work; and were the best^{est} poet in the world to give us at this day such a list of killed and wounded, he would not escape universal censure, to the praise of a more enlightened age be it spoken. I have waded through much blood, and through much more I must wade before I shall have finished. I determine in the mean time to account it all very sublime, and for two reasons,—First, because all the learned think so; and secondly, because I am to translate it. But were I an indifferent by-stander, perhaps I should venture to wish that Homer had applied his wonderful powers to a less disgusting subject. He has in the *Odyssey*, and I long to get at it.

I have not the good fortune to meet with any of these fine things, that you say are printed in my praise. But I learn from certain advertisements in the *Morning Herald*, that I make a conspicuous figure in the entertainments of Freemasons' Hall. I learn also that my volumes are out of print, and that a third edition is soon to be published. But if I am not gratified with the sight of odes composed to my honour and

glory, I have at least been tickled with some *douceurs* of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the best of men ;—an unknown gentleman has read my inimitable poems, and invites me to his seat in Hampshire ;—another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden, and a Welsh attorney sends me his verses to revise, and obligingly asks,

“ Say, shall my little bark attendant sail,
Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale ? ”

If you find me a little vain hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter ; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater.

Mrs. Unwin is as much delighted as myself with our present situation. But it is a sort of April-weather life that we lead in this world. A little sunshine is generally the prelude to a storm. Hardly had we begun to enjoy the change, when the death of her son cast a gloom upon every thing. He was a most exemplary man ; of your order ; learned, polite, and amiable. The father of lovely children, and the husband of a wife (very much like dear Mrs. Bagot) who adored him. Adieu, my friend !—Your affectionate

W. C.

CXCv

*To the Rev. John Newton.**Jan. 13, 1787.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It gave me pleasure, such as it was, to learn by a letter from Mr. H. Thornton, that the Inscription for the tomb of poor Unwin has been approved of. The dead have nothing to do with human praises; but if they die in the Lord, they have abundant praises to render Him; which is far better. The dead, whatever they leave behind them, have nothing to regret. Good Christians are the only creatures in the world that are truly good; and them they will see again, and see them improved: therefore them they regret not. Regret is for the living. What we get, we soon lose; and what we lose, we regret. The most obvious consolation in this case seems to be, that we who regret others, shall quickly become objects of regret ourselves; for mankind are continually passing off in a rapid succession.

I have many kind friends, who, like yourself, wish that, instead of turning my endeavours to a translation of Homer, I had proceeded in the way of original poetry. But I can truly say that it was ordered otherwise, not by me, but by the Providence that governs all my thoughts, and directs my intentions as he pleases. It may seem strange, but it is true, that after having written a volume, in general with great ease to

myself, I found it impossible to write another page. The mind of man is not a fountain, but a cistern ; and mine, God knows, a broken one. It is my creed, that the intellect depends as much, both for the energy and the multitude of its exertions, upon the operations of *God's* agency upon it, as the heart, for the exercise of its graces, upon the influence of the Holy Spirit. According to this persuasion, I may very reasonably affirm, that it was not God's pleasure that I should proceed in the same track, because he did not enable me to do it. A whole year I waited and waited in circumstances of mind that made a state of non-employment peculiarly irksome to me. I longed for the pen, as the only remedy, but I could find no subject ; extreme distress of spirit at last drove me, as, if I mistake not, I told you some time since, to lay Homer before me, and translate for amusement. Why it pleased God that I should be hunted into such a business, of such enormous length and labour, by miseries for which He did not see good to afford me any other remedy, I know not. But so it was ; and jejune as the consolation may be, and unsuited to the exigencies of a mind that once was spiritual, yet a thousand times have I been glad of it ; for a thousand times it has served at least to divert my attention, in some degree, from such terrible tempests as I believe have seldom been permitted to beat upon a human mind. Let my friends, therefore, who wish me some little measure of tranquillity in the performance of the most turbulent voyage that ever Christian mariner made, be contented, that,

having Homer's mountains and forests to windward, I escape, under their shelter, from the force of many a gust that would almost overset me ; especially when they consider that, not by choice, but by necessity, I make *them* my refuge. As to fame, and honour, and glory, that may be acquired by poetical feats of any sort, God knows, that if I could lay me down in my grave with hope at my side, or sit with hope at my side in a dungeon all the residue of my days, I would cheerfully wave them all. For the little fame that I have already earned has never saved me from one distressing night, or from one despairing day, since I first acquired it. *For* what I am reserved, or *to* what, is a mystery ; I would fain hope, not merely that I may amuse others, or only to be a translator of Homer.

Sally Perry's case has given us much concern. I have no doubt that it is distemper. But distresses of mind, that are occasioned by distemper, are the most difficult of all to deal with. They refuse all consolation ; they will hear no reason. God only, by his own immediate impressions can remove them ; as, after an experience of thirteen years' misery, I can abundantly testify.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

CXCVI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Jan. 18, 1787.

I have been so much indisposed with the fever

that I told you had seized me, my nights during the whole week may be said to have been almost sleepless. The consequence has been, that except the translation of about thirty lines at the conclusion of the thirteenth book, I have been forced to abandon Homer entirely. This was a sensible mortification to me, as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard therefore to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly, that is to say, Mrs. Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time, and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world.

Mrs. Carter thinks on the subject of dreams as every body else does, that is to say, according to her own experience. She has had no extraordinary ones, and therefore accounts them only the ordinary operations of the fancy. Mine are of a texture that will not suffer me to ascribe them to so inadequate a cause, or to any cause but the operation of an

exterior agency. I have a mind, my dear, (and to you I will venture to boast of it) as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. Some very sensible persons, and I suppose Mrs. Carter among them, will acknowledge that in old times God spoke by dreams, but affirm with much boldness that he has since ceased to do so. If you ask them why? they answer, because he has now revealed his will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that he should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts he has left us in want of nothing; but has he thereby precluded himself in any of the operations of his Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration; and the same need that there ever was of his interference in this way, there is still, and ever must be, while man continues blind and fallible, and a creature beset with dangers which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations however of this kind are, I allow, very rare; and as to the generality of dreams, they are made of such stuff, and are in themselves so insignificant, that though I believe them all to be the manufacture of others, not our own, I account it not a farthing-matter who manufactures them. So much for dreams!

My fever is not yet gone, but sometimes seems to leave me. It is altogether of the nervous kind, and attended, now and then, with much dejection.

A young gentleman called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey to London from Glasgow, having just left the university there. He came I suppose partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of some of the Scotch professors for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it.—Adieu, very affectionately,

W. C.

CXCVII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, July 24, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

This is the first time I have written these six months, and nothing but the constraint of obligation could induce me to write now. I cannot be so wanting to myself as not to endeavour at least to thank you both for the visits with which you have favoured me, and the poems that you sent me; in my present state of mind I taste nothing, nevertheless I read, partly from habit, and partly because it is the only thing that I am capable of.

I have therefore read Burns's poems, and have read them twice; and though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects

much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is I believe the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life since Shakespeare, (I should rather say since Prior,) who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured. It will be pity if he should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel. He who can command admiration, dishonours himself if he aims no higher than to raise a laugh.

I am, dear sir, with my best wishes for your prosperity, and with Mrs. Unwin's respects, your obliged and affectionate humble servant,

W. C.

CXCVIII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, *Aug. 27, 1787.*

DEAR SIR,

I have not yet taken up the pen again, except to write to you. The little taste that I have had of your company, and your kindness in finding me out, make me wish that we were nearer neighbours, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years; that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life, I flatter

myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard, as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me, will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if, on a future occasion, I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so,—is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects, as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the use of it, I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle. The only mercy that I show myself in this respect is, that I read nothing that requires much closeness of application. I lately finished the perusal of a book, which in former years I have more than once attacked, but never till now conquered; some other book always interfered before I could finish it. The work I mean is Barclay's *Argenis*; and if ever you allow yourself to read for mere amusement, I can recommend it to you, (provided you have not already perused it,) as the most

amusing romance that ever was written. It is the only one indeed of an old date that I ever had the patience to go through with. It is interesting in a high degree ; richer in incident than can be imagined, full of surprises, which the reader never forestalls, and yet free from all entanglement and confusion. The style too appears to me to be such as would not dishonour Tacitus himself.

Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country, through our ignorance of his language. I despair of meeting with any Englishman who will take the pains that I have taken to understand him. His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern. I lent him to a very sensible neighbour of mine : but his uncouth dialect spoiled all ; and before he had half read him through, he was quite *ram-feezled*.

W. C.

CXCIX

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *Aug. 30, 1787.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Though it costs me something to write, it would cost me more to be silent. My intercourse with my neighbours being renewed, I can no longer seem to forget how many reasons there are, why you especially should not be neglected,—no neighbour indeed, but the kindest of my friends, and ere long, I hope, an inmate.

My health and spirits seem to be mending daily : to what end I know not, neither will conjecture, but endeavour, as far as I can, to be content that they do so. I use exercise, and take the air in the park and wilderness : I read much, but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends, than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr. Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his ground, has now given me possession of his library : an acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my own. By his means I have been so well supplied, that I have not yet even looked at the *Lounger*, for which however I do not forget that I am obliged to you. *His* turn comes next, and I shall probably begin him to-morrow.

Mr. George Throckmorton is at the Hall. I thought I had known these brothers long enough to have found out all their talents and accomplishments ; but I was mistaken. The day before yesterday, after having walked with us, they *carried* us up to the library, (a more accurate writer would have said, *conducted* us,) and then they showed me the contents of an immense port-folio, the work of their own hands. It was furnished with drawings of the architectural kind, executed in a most masterly manner, and among others, con-

tained outside and inside views of the Pantheon,—I mean the Roman one. They were all, I believe, made at Rome. Some men may be estimated at a first interview, but the Throckmortons must be seen often, and known long, before one can understand all their value.

They often enquire after you, and ask me whether you visit Weston this autumn. I answer, yes; and I charge you, my dearest cousin, to authenticate my information. Write to me, and tell us when we may expect to see you. We were disappointed that we had no letter from you this morning. You will find me coated and buttoned according to your recommendation.

I write but little, because writing is become new to me; but I shall come on by degrees. Mrs. Unwin begs to be affectionately remembered to you. She is in tolerable health, which is the chief comfort here that I have to boast of.—Yours, my dearest cousin, as ever,

W. C.

CC

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *Sept. 4, 1787.*

MY DEAREST COZ,

Come when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry that

your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you ; sorry too that my uncle's infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect ; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who like him escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some smatch of my youth*, I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect, *when I least expect it*, to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future.

Mr. G. is here, Mrs. Throckmorton's uncle. He is lately arrived from Italy, where he has resided several years, and is so much the gentleman, that it is impossible to be more so : sensible, polite, obliging ; slender in his figure, and in manners most engaging,—every way worthy to be related to the Throckmortons.

I have read Savary's *Travels into Egypt* ; *Memoirs du Baron de Tott* ; Fenn's *Original Letters* ; the *Letters of Frederic of Bohemia* ; and am now reading *Memoirs d'Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise*. I have also read Barclay's *Argenis*, a Latin romance, and the best romance that ever was written. All these, together with Madan's *Letters to Priestley*, and several pamphlets, within these two months. So I am a great reader.

W. C.

CCI

*To Lady Hesketh.*THE LODGE, *Sept. 15, 1787.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

On Monday last I was invited to meet your friend Miss Jekyll at the Hall, and there we found her. Her good nature, her humorous manner, and her good sense, are charming; insomuch that even I, who was never much addicted to speech-making, and who at present find myself particularly indisposed to it, could not help saying at parting, I am glad that I have seen you, and sorry that I have seen so little of you. We were sometimes many in company: on Thursday we were fifteen, but we had not altogether so much vivacity and cleverness as Miss Jekyll, whose talent at mirth-making has this rare property to recommend it, that nobody suffers by it.

I am making a gravel walk for winter use, under a warm hedge in the orchard. It shall be furnished with a low seat for your accommodation, and if you do but like it I shall be satisfied. In wet weather, or rather after wet weather, when the street is dirty, it will suit you well, for lying on an easy declivity through its whole length, it must of course be immediately dry.

You are very much wished for by our friends at the Hall:—how much by me I will not tell you till the second week in October,—Yours,

W. C.

CCII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Oct. 5, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

My uncle's commendation of my hand-writing was the more agreeable to me as I have seldom received any on that subject. I write generally in the helter-skelter way, concerning myself about nothing more than to be legible. I am sorry for his deafness, which I hope however, by this time, the doctor and the doctor's engine have removed. It is well if he is cheerful under that malady, which oppresses the spirits of most men more than any other disorder that is not accompanied with pain. We have but few senses, and can spare none of them without much inconvenience. But I know that when my uncle's spirits are good, they are proof against all oppression.

Mrs. Throck has not written to me, and now will not. Mr. Gregson had a letter from one of them to-day, in which they send compliments to us, and tell us they will be at home on Tuesday. How should she find time to write to me, who has been visiting her brother, one of the gayest young men in the world, who is building a great house, and has one of the finest pieces of water in England, with thirty boats on it? I am sorry to hear that his youth, and his riches together, bid fair to ruin him,—that he is

a prey to his neighbours, plays deep, and consequently cannot be rich long. Excessive goodness is a quality attended with so much danger to a young man, that, amiable as it is, one cannot help pitying the man that owns it.

Mrs. Chester paid her first visit here last Saturday, a prelude, no doubt, to the visit that she intends to you. I was angry with her for her omission of a civility to which you are so highly entitled ; but now that she discovers symptoms of repentance, feel myself inclined to pardon her. She is one of those women, indeed, to whom one pardons every thing the moment they appear,—not handsome, but showing a gentleness in her countenance, voice, and manner, that speaks irresistibly in her favour.

Your newspaper, for which I thank you, my cousin, pleases me more than any that I have seen lately. The pertness of the *Herald* is my detestation, yet I always read it ; and why ? because it is a newspaper, and should therefore doubtless read it were it ten times more disgusting than it is. Fielding was the only man who ever attempted to be witty with success in a newspaper, and even he could not support it long. But he led the way in his *Covent Garden Journal*, and a thousand blockheads have followed him. I am not pleased, however, with that furious attack upon the poor Abbé Mann. The zealous Protestant who makes it, discovers too much of that spirit which he charges upon the Papists. The poor Abbé's narrative was in a manner extorted

from him ; and when I read it, instead of finding it insidious and hostile to the interests of the Church of England, I was foolish enough to think it discreet, modest, temperate. The gentleman, therefore, has either more zeal, or a better nose at a plot, than I have.

The bedstead, my dear, suffered nothing by the long delay and the bad lodging that it met with : it could not have looked better than it does had it arrived at the time intended. It lost a screw indeed ; but our neighbour the tailor, happening to have an odd one exactly of the right size, supplied the deficiency. It will have its furniture to-morrow.

Poor Teedon, whom I dare say you remember, has never missed calling here once, and generally twice, a week since January last. The poor man has gratitude if he has not wit, and in the possession of that one good quality has a sufficient recommendation. I blame myself often for finding him tiresome, but cannot help it. My only comfort is that I should be more weary of thousands who have all the cleverness that has been denied to Teedon.

I have been reading Hanway's *Travels*, and of course the history of Nadir Shah, *alias* Kouli Khan—a hero ! my dear,—and I am old enough to remember the time when he was accounted one. He built up pyramids of human heads, and had consequently many admirers. But he has found few, I imagine, in the world to which he is gone to give an account of his building. I have now just entered upon Baker's

Chronicle, having never seen it in my life till I found it in the Hall library. It is a book at which you and I should have laughed immoderately, some years ago. It is equally wise and foolish, which makes the most ridiculous mixture in the world.

With Mrs. U.'s affectionate respects, my dearest cousin,—I am ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCIII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, Oct. 19, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

A summons from Johnson, which I received yesterday, calls my attention once more to the business of translation. Before I begin I am willing to catch though but a short opportunity to acknowledge your last favour. The necessity of applying myself with all diligence to a long work that has been but too long interrupted, will make my opportunities of writing rare in future.

Air and exercise are necessary to all men, but particularly so to the man whose mind labours ; and to him who has been all his life accustomed to much of both, they are necessary in the extreme. My time since we parted, has been devoted entirely to the recovery of health and strength for this service, and I am willing to hope with good effect. Ten months have

passed since I discontinued my poetical efforts ; I do not expect to find the same readiness as before, till exercise of the neglected faculty, such as it is, shall have restored it to me.

You find yourself, I hope, by this time as comfortably situated in your new abode, as in a new abode one can be. I enter perfectly into all your feelings on occasion of the change. A sensible mind cannot do violence even to a local attachment without much pain. When my father died I was young, too young to have reflected much. He was Rector of Berkhamstead, and there I was born. It had never occurred to me that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then, and not till then, I felt for the first time that I and my native place were disunited for ever. I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I should never be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more.

W. C.

CCIV

To Lady Hesketh, New Norfolk Street, Grosvenor Square, London.

THE LODGE,
Saturday, Oct. 27, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Now that there is something like a time appointed, I feel myself a little more at my ease. Days and weeks slide imperceptibly away ; November is just at hand, and the half of it, as you observe, will soon be over. Then no impediment intervening, we shall meet once more,—a happiness of which I so lately despaired. My uncle, who so kindly spared you before, will I doubt not spare you again. He knows that a little frisk in country air will be serviceable to you, and even to my welfare, which is not a little concerned in the matter, I am persuaded he is not indifferent. For this and for many other reasons I ardently wish that he may enjoy and long enjoy the present measure of health, with which he is favoured. Our wants are included within the compass of two items. *I* want a watch-string, and we *both* are in want of certain things, called candle-ends, but of wax, not *tallow-fats*. Those with which you furnished us at Olney are not quite expended indeed, but are drawing near to their dissolution. Should I after farther scrutiny discover any other deficiencies, you shall know them.

You need not, my dear, be under any apprehensions lest I should too soon engage again in the translation of Homer. My health and strength of spirits for this service are, I believe, exactly in *statu quo prius*. But Mrs. Unwin having enlarged upon this head, I will therefore say the less. Whether I shall live to finish it, or whether, if I should, I shall live to enjoy any fruit of my labours, are articles in my account of such extreme uncertainty, that I feel them often operate as no small discouragement. But uncertain as these things are, I yet consider the employment *essential* to my present well-being, and pursue it accordingly. But had Pope been subject to the same alarming speculations, had he waking and sleeping dreamt as I do, I am inclined to think he would not have been my predecessor in these labours; for I compliment myself with a persuasion that I have more heroic valour, of the passive kind at least, than he had,—perhaps than any man; it would be strange had I not, after so much exercise.

By some accident or other it comes to pass that I see the Throckmortons daily. Yesterday, soon after I had received your letter, I met them armed with bow and arrows, going to practise at the target in the garden. I consulted them on the subject of the best road from Newport hither, and the prevailing opinion was in favour of the road through Emberton. It is rough, indeed, but not so heavy as the road by Gayhurst. Mrs. Throck, anxious to put the matter past all doubt, cut a caper on the grass-plot, and said she

would go ride to Olney immediately on purpose to examine the road. If her report contains any thing material, you shall hear it. . . .

Farewell, my dearest coz! the month that you speak of will be short indeed, unless you can contrive to lengthen it.—Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCV

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Nov. 10, 1787.

The parliament, my dearest cousin, prorogued continually, is a meteor dancing before my eyes, promising me my wish only to disappoint me, and none but the king and his ministers can tell when you and I shall come together. I hope however that the period, though so often postponed, is not far distant, and that once more I shall behold you, and experience your power to make winter gay and sprightly.

I have a kitten, my dear, the drollest of all creatures that ever wore a cat's skin. Her gambols are not to be described, and would be incredible, if they could. In point of size she is likely to be a kitten always, being extremely small of her age, but time I suppose, that spoils every thing, will make her also a cat. You will see her I hope before that melancholy period shall arrive, for no wisdom that she may gain by experience and reflection hereafter, will compensate the loss of

her present hilarity. She is dressed in a tortoise-shell suit, and I know that you will delight in her.

Mrs. Throckmorton carries us to-morrow in her chaise to Chicheley. The event however must be supposed to depend on elements, at least on the state of the atmosphere, which is turbulent beyond measure. Yesterday it thundered, last night it lightened, and at three this morning I saw the sky as red as a city in flames could have made it. I have a leech in a bottle that foretells all these prodigies and convulsions of nature: no, not as you will naturally conjecture by articulate utterance of oracular notices, but by a variety of gesticulations, which here I have not room to give an account of. Suffice it to say, that no change of weather surprises him, and that in point of the earliest and most accurate intelligence, he is worth all the barometers in the world. None of them all indeed can make the least pretence to foretell thunder—a species of capacity of which he has given the most unequivocal evidence. I gave but sixpence for him, which is a groat more than the market price, though he is in fact, or rather would be, if leeches were not found in every ditch, an invaluable acquisition.

W. C.

CCVI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Nov. 27, 1787.

It is the part of wisdom, my dearest cousin, to sit

down contented under the demands of necessity, because they are such. I am sensible that you cannot in my uncle's present infirm state, and of which it is not possible to expect any considerable amendment, indulge either us, or yourself, with a journey to Weston. Yourself I say, both because I know it will give you pleasure to see *Causidice mi*¹ once more, especially in the comfortable abode where you have placed him, and because after so long an imprisonment in London, you who love the country and have a taste for it, would of course be glad to return to it. For my own part, to me it is ever new, and though I have now been an inhabitant of this village a twelvemonth, and have during the half of that time been at liberty to expatiate, and to make discoveries, I am daily finding out fresh scenes and walks, which you would never be satisfied with enjoying ;—some of them are unapproachable by you either on foot or in your carriage. Had you twenty toes (whereas I suppose you have but ten) you could not reach them ; and coach wheels have never been seen there since the flood. Before it indeed, (as Burnet says that the earth was then perfectly free from all inequalities in its surface,) they might have been seen there every day. We have other walks both upon hill tops and in valleys beneath, some of which by the help of your carriage, and many of them without its help, would be always at your command.

¹ The appellation which Sir Thomas Hesketh used to give him in jest, when he was of the Temple.—R. SOUTHEY.

On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows: "Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All-Saints, in Northampton; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You would do me a great favour, Sir, if you would furnish me with one." To this I replied, "Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox the statuary, who, every body knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose."—"Alas! Sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading, that the people of our town cannot understand him." I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my Muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig

for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals ! I have written *one*, that serves *two hundred* persons.

A few days since, I received a second very obliging letter from Mr. Mackenzie.¹ He tells me that his own papers, which are by far, he is sorry to say it, the most numerous, are marked V. I. Z. Accordingly, my dear, I am happy to find that I am engaged in a correspondence with Mr. Viz, a gentleman for whom I have always entertained the profoundest veneration. But the serious fact is, that the papers distinguished by those signatures have ever pleased me most, and struck me as the work of a sensible man, who knows the world well, and has more of Addison's delicate humour than any body.

A poor man begged food at the Hall lately. The cook gave him some vermicelli soup. He ladled it about sometime with the spoon, and then returned it to her, saying, "I am a poor man it is true, and I am very hungry, but yet I cannot eat broth with maggots in it." Once more, my dear, a thousand thanks for your box full of good things, useful things, and beautiful things.—Yours ever,

W. C.

¹ Henry Mackenzie, of Edinburgh (1745-1831), author of *The Man of Feeling*. The magazine in which the papers referred to by Cowper appeared was probably *The Lounger*, which Mackenzie edited from 1785 to 1787, and to which he contributed many articles.

CCVII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Dec. 10, 1787.

I thank you for the snip of cloth, commonly called a pattern. At present I have two coats, and but one back. If at any time hereafter I should find myself possessed of fewer coats, or more backs, it will be of use to me.

Even as you suspect, my dear, so it proved. The ball was prepared for, the ball was held, and the ball passed, and we had nothing to do with it. Mrs. Throckmorton, knowing our trim, did not give us the pain of an invitation, for a pain it would have been. And why? as Sternhold says,—because, as Hopkins answers, we must have refused it. But it fell out singularly enough, that this ball was held, of all days in the year, on my birth day—and so I told them—but not till it was all over.

Though I have thought proper never to take any notice of the arrival of my MSS. together with the *other good things* in the box, yet certain it is, that I received them. I have furbished up the tenth book till it is as bright as silver, and am now occupied in bestowing the same labour upon the eleventh. The twelfth and thirteenth are in the hands of —, and the fourteenth and fifteenth are ready to succeed them. This notable job is the delight of my heart, and how sorry shall I be when it is ended.

The smith and the carpenter, my dear, are both in the room, hanging a bell; if I therefore make a thousand blunders, let the said intruders answer for them all.

I thank you, my dear, for your history of the G—s. What changes in that family! And how many thousand families have in the same time experienced changes as violent as theirs! The course of a rapid river is the justest of all emblems, to express the variableness of our scene below. Shakspeare says, none ever bathed himself twice in the same stream, and it is equally true that the world upon which we close our eyes at night is never the same with that on which we open them in the morning.

I do not always say, give my love to my uncle, because he knows that I always love him. I do not always present Mrs. Unwin's love to you, partly for the same reason, (Deuce take the smith and the carpenter!) and partly because I forget it. But to present my own I forget never, for I always have to finish my letter, which I know not how to do, my dearest coz, without telling you that I am—Ever yours,

W. C.

CCVIII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, Dec. 13. 1787.

DEAR SIR,

Unless my memory deceives me, I forewarned you

that I should prove a very unpunctual correspondent. The work that lies before me engages unavoidably my whole attention. The length of it, the spirit of it, and the exactness that is requisite to its due performance, are so many most interesting subjects of consideration to me, who find that my best attempts are only introductory to others, and that what to-day I suppose finished, to-morrow I must begin again. Thus it fares with a translator of Homer. To exhibit the majesty of such a poet in a modern language is a task that no man can estimate the difficulty of till he attempts it. To paraphrase him loosely, to hang him with trappings that do not belong to him, all this is comparatively easy. But to represent him with only his own ornaments, and still to preserve his dignity, is a labour that, if I hope in any measure to achieve it, I am sensible can only be achieved by the most assiduous and most unremitting attention. Our studies, however different in themselves, in respect of the means by which they are to be successfully carried on, bear some resemblance to each other. A perseverance that nothing can discourage, a minuteness of observation that suffers nothing to escape, and a determination not to be seduced from the straight line that lies before us, by any images with which fancy may present us, are essentials that should be common to us both. There are perhaps few arduous undertakings, that are not in fact more arduous than we at first supposed them. As we proceed, difficulties increase upon us, but our hopes gather strength also, and we conquer difficulties

which, could we have foreseen them, we should never have had the boldness to encounter. May this be your experience, as I doubt not that it will. You possess by nature all that is necessary to success in the profession that you have chosen. What remains is in your own power. They say of poets, that they must be born such : so must mathematicians, so must great generals, and so must lawyers, and so indeed must men of all denominations, or it is not possible that they should excel. But with whatever faculties we are born, and to whatever studies our genius may direct us, studies they must still be. I am persuaded, that Milton did not write his *Paradise Lost*, nor Homer his *Iliad*, nor Newton his *Principia*, without immense labour. Nature gave them a bias to their respective pursuits, and that strong propensity, I suppose, is what we mean by genius. The rest they gave themselves. "*Macte esto*," therefore, have no fears for the issue !

I have had a second kind letter from your friend Mr. —, which I have just answered. I must not I find hope to see him here, at least I must not much expect it. He has a family that does not permit him to fly southward. I have also a notion, that we three could spend a few days comfortably together, especially in a country like this, abounding in scenes with which I am sure you would both be delighted. Having lived till lately at some distance from the spot that I now inhabit, and having never been master of any sort of vehicle whatever, it is but just now that I begin

myself to be acquainted with the beauties of our situation. To you I may hope, one time or other, to show them, and shall be happy to do it, when an opportunity offers.—Yours, most affectionately,

W. C.

CCIX

To Lady Hesketh.

Dec. 19, 1787 (in Post mark).

Saturday, my dearest cousin, was a day of receipts. In the morning I received a box filled with an abundant variety of stationery ware, containing, in particular, a quantity of paper sufficient, well covered with good writing, to immortalize any man. I have nothing to do, therefore, but to cover it as aforesaid, and my name will never die. In the evening I received a smaller box, but still more welcome on account of its contents. It contained an almanack in red morocco, a pencil of a new invention, called an everlasting pencil, and a noble purse, with a noble gift in it, called a Bank note for twenty-five pounds. I need use no arguments to assure you, my cousin, that by the help of ditto note, we shall be able to fadge very comfortably till Christmas is turned, without having the least occasion to draw upon you. By the post yesterday—that is, Sunday morning—I received also a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularized; in which letter

allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, *The Drop of Ink*. The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and *Anonymous* there may be some communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it.

My toothache is in a great measure, that is to say, almost entirely removed ; not by snipping my ears, as poor Lady Strange's ears were snipped, nor by any other chirurgical operation, except such as I could perform myself. The manner of it was as follows : we dined last Thursday at the Hall ; I sat down to table, trembling lest the tooth, of which I told you in my last, should not only refuse its own office, but hinder all the rest. Accordingly, in less than five minutes, by a hideous dislocation of it, I found myself not only in great pain, but under an absolute prohibition not only to eat, but to speak another word. Great emergencies sometimes meet the most effectual remedies. I resolved, if it were possible, then and there to draw it. This I effected so dexterously by a sudden twitch, and afterwards so dexterously conveyed it into my pocket, that no creature present, not even Mrs. Unwin, who sat facing me, was sensible either of my distress, or of the manner of my deliverance from it. I am poorer by one tooth than I was, but richer by the unimpeded use of all the rest.

When I lived in the Temple, I was rather intimate

with a son of the late Admiral Rowley and a younger brother of the present Admiral. Since I wrote to you last, I received a letter from him, in a very friendly and affectionate style. It accompanied half a dozen books, which I had lent him five and twenty years ago, and which he apologized for having kept so long, telling me that they had been sent to him at Dublin by mistake; for at Dublin, it seems, he now resides. Reading my poems, he felt, he said, his friendship for me revive, and wrote accordingly. I have now, therefore, a correspondent in Ireland, another in Scotland, and a third in Wales. All this would be very diverting, had I a little more time to spare to them.

My dog, my dear, is a spaniel. Till Miss Gunning begged him, he was the property of a farmer, and while he was their property had been accustomed to lie in the chimney corner, among the embers, till the hair was singed from his back, and till nothing was left of his tail but the gristle. Allowing for these disadvantages, he is really handsome; and when nature shall have furnished him with a new coat, a gift which, in consideration of the ragged condition of his old one, it is hoped she will not long delay, he will then be unrivalled in personal endowments by any dog in this country. He and my cat are excessively fond of each other, and play a thousand gambols together that it is impossible not to admire..

Know thou, that from this time forth, the post comes daily to Weston. This improvement is effected

by an annual subscription of ten shillings. The Throcks invited us to the measure, and we have acceded to it. Their servant will manage this concern for us at the Olney post office, and the subscription is to pay a man for stumping three times a week from Olney to Newport Pagnel, and back again.

Returning from my walk to-day, while I was passing by some small closes at the back of the town, I heard the voices of some persons extremely merry at the top of the hill. Advancing into the large field behind our house, I there met Mr. Throck, wife, and brother George. Combine in your imagination as large proportions as you can of earth and water intermingled so as to constitute what is commonly called mud, and you will have but an imperfect conception of the quantity that had attached itself to her petticoats: but she had half-boots, and laughed at her own figure. She told me that she had this morning transcribed sixteen pages of my Homer. I observed in reply, that to write so much, and to gather all that dirt, was no bad morning's work, considering the shortness of the days at this season.—Yours, my dear,

W. C.

CCX

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Dec. 24, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The Throcks do not leave Weston till after Easter.

But this I hope will have no effect upon your movements, should an opportunity present itself to you of coming sooner. We dined there last Saturday. After dinner, while we all sat round the fire, I told them, as I related it to you, the adventure of my tooth. This drew from Mrs. Throck, (singular as it must appear,) a tale the very counterpart of mine. She, in like manner, had a tooth to draw, while I was drawing mine; and thus it came to pass (the world, I suppose, could not furnish such another instance) that we two, without the least intimation to each other of our respective distress, were employed in the same moment, sitting side by side, in drawing each a tooth: an operation which we performed with equal address, and without being perceived by any one.

This morning had very near been a tragical one to me, beyond all that have ever risen upon me. Mrs. Unwin rose as usual at seven o'clock; at eight she came to me, and showed me her bed-gown with a great piece burnt out of it. Having lighted her fire, which she always lights herself, she placed the candle upon the hearth. In a few moments it occurred to her that, if it continued there, it might possibly set fire to her clothes, therefore she put it out. But in fact, though she had not the least suspicion of it, her clothes were on fire at that very time. She found herself uncommonly annoyed by smoke, such as brought the water into her eyes; supposing that some of the billets might lie too forward, she disposed them differently; but finding the smoke increase, and grow more

troublesome, (for by this time the room was filled with it,) she cast her eye downward, and perceived not only her bed-gown, but her petticoat on fire. She had the presence of mind to gather them in her hand, and plunge them immediately into the basin, by which means the general conflagration of her person, which must probably have ensued in a few moments, was effectually prevented. Thus was that which I have often heard from the pulpit, and have often had occasion myself to observe, most clearly illustrated,—that, secure as we may sometimes seem to ourselves, we are in reality never so safe as to have no need of a superintending Providence. Danger can never be at a distance from creatures who dwell in houses of clay. Therefore take care of thyself, gentle Yahoo! and may a more vigilant than thou care for thee.

On the day when we dined as abovementioned at the Hall, Mrs. Throck had paid a morning visit at When I enquired how she found Mrs. . . . her account of her was as follows: “They say she is much better, but to judge by her looks and her manner, there is no ground to think so. She looks dreadfully, and talks in a rambling way without ceasing.” If this be a just description of her, and I do not at all doubt it, I am afraid, poor woman! that she is far from well, notwithstanding all that the physician of minds has done for her. In effect there is but One who merits that title; and were all the frantic who have been restored to their reason to

make a reasonable use of it, they would acknowledge that God, and not man, had cured them.

I thank you, my dear, for your intentions to furnish me, had I not been otherwise accommodated with one, with an everlasting pencil. You may yet perhaps, on some distant day, have an opportunity to fulfil those intentions, for "everlasting," as it is called, it is not such in point of duration; but claims the title on this account only, that in the using, it perpetually works itself to a point, and never wants cutting. Otherwise it wastes and wears, as every thing made of earthly materials must.

When the Throcks happen to mention the chairs again, your directions shall be pursued. As to the balance due on the plate account, it was, before the purchase of the silk handkerchiefs, etc., either six pounds or six guineas—we cannot recollect which. With the remainder, whatever it shall be found to be, Mrs. Unwin will be obliged to you if you will give it in commission to Mrs. Eaton, to buy for her some muslin for aprons, of the sort that you wore when you were at Olney, viz. with cross stripes. She thinks you called it an English muslin. They must be ell and nail long. But at the same time it does not appear probable to either of us, that there should be money remaining in your hands sufficient for this purpose.

I forgot to tell you that my dog is spotted liver-colour and white, or rather white and chestnut. He is at present my pupil as well as dog, and just before

I sat down to write I gave him a lesson in the science of fetch and carry. He performs with an animation past all conception, except your own, whose poor head will never forget Tinker. But I am now grown more reasonable, and never make such a dreadful din but when Beau and I are together. To teach him is necessary, in order that he may take the water, and *that* is necessary in order that he may be sweet in summer. Farewell, my dearest coz.—I am, with Mrs. U.'s affections, ever thine, most truly,

WM. COWPER.

CCXI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Jan. 19, 1788.

When I have prose enough to fill my paper, which is always the case when I write to you, I cannot find in my heart to give a third part of it to verse. Yet this I must do, or I must make my packets more costly than worshipful, by doubling the postage upon you, which I should hold to be unreasonable. See then the true reason why I did not send you that same scribblement till you desired it. The thought which naturally presents itself to me on all such occasions is this,—Is not your cousin coming? Why are you impatient? Will it not be time enough to show her your fine things when she arrives?

Fine things indeed I have few. He who has Homer

to transcribe may well be contented to do little else. As when an ass, being harnessed with ropes to a sand cart, drags with hanging ears his heavy burthen, neither filling the long echoing streets with his harmonious bray, nor throwing up his heels behind, frolicsome and airy, as asses less engaged are wont to do ; so I, satisfied to find myself indispensably obliged to render into the best possible English metre eight and forty Greek books, of which the two finest poems in the world consist, account it quite sufficient, if I may at last achieve that labour ; and seldom allow myself those pretty little vagaries, in which I should otherwise delight, and of which, if I should live long enough, I intend hereafter to enjoy my fill.

This is the reason, my dear cousin, if I may be permitted to call you so in the same breath with which I have uttered this truly heroic comparison,—this is the reason why I produce at present but few occasional poems, and the preceding reason is that which may account satisfactorily enough for my withholding the very few that I do produce. A thought sometimes strikes me before I rise ; if it runs readily into verse, and I can finish it before breakfast, it is well ; otherwise it dies, and is forgotten ; for all the subsequent hours are devoted to Homer.

The day before yesterday, I saw for the first time Bunbury's new print, *The Propagation of a Lie*. Mr. Throckmorton sent it for the amusement of our party. Bunbury sells humour by the yard, and is, I suppose, the first vender of it who ever did so. He cannot

therefore be said to have humour without measure, (pardon a pun, my dear, from a man who has not made one before these forty years,) though he may certainly be said to be immeasurably droll.

The original thought is good, and the exemplification of it, in those very expressive figures, admirable. A poem on the same subject, displaying all that is displayed in those attitudes, and in those features, (for faces they can hardly be called) would be most excellent. The affinity of the two arts, viz. verse and painting, has been observed; possibly the happiest illustration of it would be found, if some poet would ally himself to some draftsman, as Bunbury, and undertake to write every thing he should draw. Then let a musician be admitted of the party. He should compose the said poem, adapting notes to it exactly accommodated to the theme; so should the sister arts be proved to be indeed sisters, and the world die of laughing.

W. C.

CCXII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *Feb. 1, 1788.*

Pardon me, my dearest cousin, the mournful ditty that I sent you last. There are times when I see every thing through a medium that distresses me to an insupportable degree, and that letter was written in one

of them. A fog that had for three days obliterated all the beauties of Weston, and a north-east wind, might possibly contribute not a little to the melancholy that indited it. But my mind is now easy; your letter has made it so, and I feel myself as blithe as a bird in comparison. I love you, my cousin, and cannot suspect, either with or without cause, the least evil in which you may be concerned, without being greatly troubled! Oh trouble! the portion of all mortals,—but mine in particular, would I had never known thee, or could bid thee farewell for ever; for I meet thee at every turn; my pillows are stuffed with thee, my very roses smell of thee, and even my cousin, who would cure me of all trouble if she could, is sometimes innocently the cause of trouble to me.

I now see the unreasonableness of my late trouble, and would, if I could trust myself so far, promise never again to trouble either myself or you in the same manner, unless warranted by some more substantial ground of apprehension.

What I said concerning Homer, my dear, was spoken, or rather written, merely under the influence of a certain jocularly that I felt at that moment. I am in reality so far from thinking myself an ass, and my translation a sand-cart, that I rather seem, in my own account of the matter, one of those flaming steeds harnessed to the chariot of Apollo, of which we read in the works of the ancients. I have lately, I know not how, acquired a certain superiority to myself in this business, and in this last revisal have elevated the

expression to a degree far surpassing its former boast. A few evenings since I had an opportunity to try how far I might venture to expect such success of my labours as can alone repay them, by reading the first book of my *Iliad* to a friend of ours. He dined with you once at Olney. His name is Greatheed, a man of letters and of taste. He dined with us, and the evening proving dark and dirty, we persuaded him to take a bed. I entertained him as I tell you. He heard me with great attention, and with evident symptoms of the highest satisfaction, which, when I had finished the exhibition, he put out of all doubt by expressions which I cannot repeat. Only this he said to Mrs. Unwin while I was in another room, that he had never entered into the spirit of Homer before, nor had any thing like a due conception of his manner. This I have said, knowing that it will please you, and will now say no more.

Adieu!—my dear, will you never speak of coming to Weston more?

W. C.

CCXIII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Feb. 7, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Thanks beforehand for the books which you give me to expect. They will all be welcome. Of the two

editions of Shakespeare I prefer that which is printed in the largest type, independent of all other considerations. *Don Quixote* by any hand must needs be welcome, and by Smollett's especially, because I have never seen it. He had a drollery of his own, which for aught I know, may suit an English taste as well as that of Cervantes, perhaps better, because to us somewhat more intelligible.

It is pretty well known, (the clerk took care it should be so,) both at Northampton and in this county, who wrote the Mortuary Verses. All that I know of their success is, that he sent a bundle of them to Maurice Smith at Olney, who sold them for threepence a piece,—a high price for a *Memento Mori*, a commodity not generally in great request. The other small poem, addressed to Mrs. Throck, has given, as I understand, great satisfaction at Bucklands. The old baronet and his lady, having heard that such a piece existed, (Mrs. Bromley Chester, I suppose, must have been their informant,) wrote to desire a copy. A copy was sent, and they answered it with warm encomiums.

Mr. Bull, the lame curate, having been lately preferred to a living, another was of course wanted to supply his place. By the recommendation of Mr. Romaine, a Mr. C. . . . came down. He lodges at Mr. Socket's in this village, and Mr. Socket lives in the small house to which you had once conceived a liking. Our lacquey is also clerk of the parish. C. . . . a day or two after his arrival had a corpse to

bury at Weston. Having occasion to consult with the clerk concerning this matter, he sought him in our kitchen. Samuel entered the study to inform us that there was a clergyman without : he was accordingly invited in, and in he came. We had but lately dined ; the wine was on the table, and he drank three glasses while the corpse in question was getting ready for its last journey. The moment he entered the room, I felt myself incurably prejudiced against him : his features, his figure, his address, and all that he uttered, confirmed that prejudice, and I determined, having once seen him, to see him no more. Two days after he overtook me in the village. "Your humble servant, Mr. Cowper ! a fine morning, sir, for a walk. I had liked to have called on you yesterday morning to tell you that I had become your near neighbour. I live at Mr. Socket's." I answered without looking at him, as drily as possible,—“Are you come to stay any time in the country ?”—He believed he was.—“Which way,” I replied, “are you going ? to Olney ?”—“Yes.”—“I am going to Mr. Throckmorton’s garden, and I wish you a good day, sir.”—I was in fact going to Olney myself, but this rencontre gave me such a violent twist another way that I found it impossible to recover that direction, and accordingly there we parted. All this I related at the Hall the next time we dined there, describing also my apprehensions and distress lest, whether I would or not, I should be obliged to have intercourse with a man to me so perfectly disagreeable. A good deal of laugh and merriment ensued,

and there for that time it ended. The following Sunday, in the evening, I received a note to this purport: "Mr. C. . . . 's compliments," etc. Understanding that my friends at the Hall were to dine with me the next day, he took the liberty to invite himself to eat a bit of mutton with me, being sure that I should be happy to introduce him. Having read the note, I threw it to Mrs. Unwin. "There," said I, "take that and read it; then tell me if it be not an effort of impudence the most extraordinary you ever heard of." I expected some such push from the man; I knew he was equal to it. She read it, and we were both of a mind. I sat down to my desk, and with a good deal of emotion gave it just such an answer as it would have deserved had it been genuine. But having heard by accident in the morning that he spells his name with a C, and observing in the note that it was spelt with a K, a suspicion struck me that it was a fiction. I looked at it more attentively and perceived that it was directed by Mrs. Throck. The inside I found afterwards was written by her brother George. This served us with another laugh on the subject, and I have hardly seen, and never spoken to, Mr. C. . . . since. So, my dear, *that's the little story I promised you.*

Mr. Bull called here this morning: from him I learn what follows concerning P. . . . He waited on the Bishop of London, like a blundering ignoramus as he is, without his canonicals. The Bishop was highly displeased, as he had cause to be; and having

pretty significantly given him to know it, addressed himself to his chaplain with tokens of equal displeasure, enjoining him never more to admit a clergyman to him in such attire. To pay this visit he made a journey from Clapham to town on horseback. His horse he left at an inn on the Lambeth side of Westminster Bridge. Thence he proceeded to the Bishop's, and from the Bishop's to Mr. Scott. Having finished this last visit he begged Mr. Scott's company to the inn where he had left his horse, which he said was at the foot of *London* Bridge. Thither they went, but neither the inn nor the horse were there. Then, says P. . . . it must be at Blackfriars' Bridge that I left it. Thither also they went, but to as little purpose. Luckily for him there was but one more bridge, and there they found it. To make the poor youth amends for all these misadventures, it so happened that the incumbent, his predecessor, died before the crops of last year were reaped. The whole profits of that year, by consequence, go into P.'s pocket, which was never so stuffed before.

Good night, my dearest coz. Mrs. Unwin's love attends you.—Affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCXIV

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Feb. 16, 1788.

I have now three letters of yours, my dearest cousin, before me, all written in the space of a week, and must be indeed insensible of kindness, did I not feel yours on this occasion. I cannot describe to you, neither could you comprehend it if I should, the manner in which my mind is sometimes impressed with melancholy on particular subjects. Your late silence was such a subject. I heard, saw, and felt a thousand terrible things which had no real existence, and was haunted by them night and day, till they at last extorted from me the doleful epistle, which I have since wished had been burned before I sent it. But the cloud has passed, and as far as you are concerned, my heart is once more at rest.

Before you gave me the hint, I had once or twice, as I lay on my bed, watching the break of day, ruminated on the subject which, in your last but one, you recommended to me.

Slavery, or a release from slavery, such as the poor negroes have endured, or perhaps both these topics together, appeared to me a theme so important at the present juncture, and at the same time so susceptible of poetical management, that I more than once perceived myself ready to start in that career, could I have allowed myself to desert Homer for so

long a time as it would have cost me to do them justice.

While I was pondering these things, the public prints informed me that Miss More was on the point of publication, having actually finished what I had not yet begun. The sight of her advertisement convinced me that my best course would be that to which I felt myself most inclined,—to persevere, without turning aside to attend to any other call, however alluring, in the business I have in hand.

It occurred to me likewise, that I have already borne my testimony in favour of my black brethren ; and that I was one of the earliest, if not the first, of those who have in the present day expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question.

On all these accounts I judged it best to be silent, and especially because I cannot doubt that some effectual measures will now be taken to alleviate the miseries of their condition, the whole nation being in possession of the case, and it being impossible also to allege an argument in behalf of man-merchandise, that can deserve a hearing. I shall be glad to see Hannah More's poem ; she is a favourite writer with me, and has more nerve and energy both in her thoughts and language than half the he rhymers in the kingdom. The *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* will likewise be most acceptable. I want to learn as much of the world as I can, but to acquire that learning at a distance ; and a book with such a title promises fair to serve the purpose effectually.

I recommend it to you, my dear, by all means to embrace the fair occasion, and to put yourself in the way of being squeezed and incommoded a few hours, for the sake of hearing and seeing what you will never have an opportunity to see and hear hereafter,—the trial of a man¹ who has been greater and more feared than the great Mogul himself. Whatever we are at home, we certainly have been tyrants in the East; and if these men have, as they are charged, rioted in the miseries of the innocent, and dealt death to the guiltless with an unsparing hand, may they receive a retribution that shall in future make all governors and judges of ours, in those distant regions, tremble! While I speak thus, I equally wish them acquitted. They were both my schoolfellows, and for Hastings I had a particular value.—Farewell.

W. C.

CCXV

To C. Rowley, Esq.

WESTON UNDERWOOD,
Feb. 21, 1788.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,

I have not, since I saw you, seen the face of any man whom I knew while you and I were neighbours

¹ Warren Hastings (1732-1818), first Governor-General of British India. His trial began in 1788, and ended with an acquittal in 1795. The opening scene of the trial before the Lords in Westminster Hall is well known from Macaulay's famous description.

in the Temple. From the Temple I went to St. Albans, thence to Cambridge, thence to Huntingdon, thence to Olney, thence hither. At Huntingdon I formed a connexion with a most valuable family of the name of Unwin, from which family I have never since been divided. The father of it is dead ; his only son is dead ; the daughter is married and gone northward ; Mrs. Unwin and I live together. We dwell in a neat and comfortable abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, where, if your Hibernian engagements would permit, I should be happy to receive you. We have one family here, and only one, with which we much associate. They are Throckmortons, descendants of Sir Nicholas of that name, young persons, but sensible, accomplished, and friendly in the highest degree. What sort of scenery lies around us I have already told you in verse ; there is no need therefore, to do it in prose. I will only add to its printed eulogium, that it affords opportunity of walking at all seasons, abounding with beautiful grass-grounds, which encompass our village on all sides to a considerable distance. These grounds are skirted by woods of great extent, belonging principally to our neighbours above mentioned. I, who love walking, and who always hated riding, who am fond of some society, but never had spirits that would endure a great deal, could not, as you perceive, be better situated. Within a few miles of us, both to the east and west, there are other families with whom we mix occasionally ; but keeping no carriage of any sort, I

cannot reach them often. Lady Hesketh (widow of Sir Thomas, whose name, at least, you remember,) spends part of the year with us, during which time I have means of conveyance, which else are not at my command.

So much for my situation. Now, what am I doing? Translating Homer. Is not this, you will say, *actum agere*? But if you think again, you will find that it is not. At least, for my own part, I can assure you that I have never seen him translated yet, except in the Dog-Latin, which you remember to have applied to for illumination when you were a school boy. We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin. Not much less than thirty years since, Alston and I read Homer through together. We compared Pope with his original all the way. The result was a discovery, that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute, as a taste for Homer. After the publication of my last volume, I found myself without employment. Employment is essential to me; I have neither health nor spirits without it. After some time, the recollection of what had passed between Alston and myself in the course of this business struck me forcibly; I remembered how we had been disgusted; how often we had sought the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representative, and had found instead of them, puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every

possible position. Neither did I forget how often we were on the point of burning Pope, as we burnt Bertram Montfitchet¹ in your chambers. I laid a Homer before me. I translated a few lines into blank verse; the day following a few more; and proceeding thus till I had finished the first book, was convinced that I could render an acceptable service to the literary world, should I be favoured with health to enable me to translate the whole. The *Iliad* I translated without interruption. That done, I published Proposals for a subscription, and can boast of a very good one. Soon after, I was taken ill, and was hindered near a twelvemonth. But I have now resumed the work, and have proceeded in it as far as to the end of the fifteenth *Iliad*, altering and amending my first copy with all the diligence I am master of. For this I will be answerable, that it shall be found a close translation: in that respect, as faithful as our language, not always a match for the Greek, will give me leave to make it. For its other qualifications, I must refer myself to the judgement of the public, when it shall appear. Thus I have fulfilled my promise, and have told you not only how I am at present occupied, but how I am likely to be for some time to come. The *Odyssey* I have not yet touched. I need not, I am confident, use any extraordinary arts of persuasion to secure to myself your influence, as far as it extends.

¹ The *Monthly Review*, for April, 1761, notices "The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfitchet, Esq., written by himself," as an humble imitation of *Tristram Shandy*.—R. SOUTHEY.

If you mention that there is such a work on the anvil in this country, in yours perhaps you will meet somebody now and then not disinclined to favour it. I would order you a parcel of printed proposals, if I knew how to send it. But they are not indispensably necessary. The terms are, two large volumes, quarto, royal paper, three guineas ; common, two.

I rejoice that you have a post, which, though less lucrative than the labours of it deserve, is yet highly honourable, and so far worthy of you. Adieu, my dear Rowley. May peace and prosperity be your portion.—Yours, very affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

CCXVI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *Feb.* 22, 1788.

I do not wonder that your ears and feelings were hurt by Mr. Burke's severe invective.¹ But you are to know, my dear, or probably you know it already, that the prosecution of public delinquents has always, and in all countries, been thus conducted. The style of a criminal charge of this kind has been an affair settled among orators from the days of Tully to the present ;

¹ Burke's first speech on the impeachment of Warren Hastings was delivered on the 15th of February, 1788 ; he spoke again on the 16th, 17th, and 19th of the same month. It is no doubt to one or more of these speeches that Cowper here refers. See above, p. 165, note.

and like all other practices that have obtained for ages, this in particular seems to have been founded originally in reason, and in the necessity of the case.

He who accuses another to the state, must not appear himself unmoved by the view of crimes with which he charges him, lest he should be suspected of fiction, or of precipitancy, or of a consciousness that after all he shall not be able to prove his allegations. On the contrary, in order to impress the minds of his hearers with a persuasion that he himself at least is convinced of the criminality of the prisoner, he must be vehement, energetic, rapid ; must call him tyrant, and traitor, and every thing else that is odious, and all this to his face, because all this, bad as it is, is no more than he undertakes to prove in the sequel. And if he cannot prove it he must himself appear in a light very little more desirable, and at the best to have trifled with the tribunal to which he has summoned him.

Thus Tully, in the very first sentence of his oration against Catiline, calls him a monster ; a manner of address in which he persisted till said monster, unable to support the fury of his accuser's eloquence any longer, rose from his seat, elbowed for himself a passage through the crowd, and at last burst from the senate house in an agony, as if the Furies themselves had followed him.

And now, my dear, though I have thus spoken, and have seemed to plead the cause of that species of eloquence which you, and every creature who has your

sentiments, must necessarily dislike, perhaps I am not altogether convinced of its propriety. Perhaps, at the bottom, I am much more of opinion that if the charge, unaccompanied by any inflammatory matter and simply detailed, being once delivered into the court and read aloud, the witnesses were immediately examined, and sentence pronounced according to the evidence; not only the process would be shortened, much time and much expense saved, but justice would have at least as fair play as now she has. Prejudice is of no use in weighing the question guilty or not guilty? and the principal aim, end, and effect of such introductory harangues is to create as much prejudice as possible. When you and I therefore shall have the sole management of such a business entrusted to us, we will order it otherwise.

I was glad to learn from the papers that our cousin Henry shone as he did in reading the charge.¹ This must have given much pleasure to the General.—Thy ever affectionate,

W. C.

CCXVII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *March 3, 1788.*

One day last week, Mrs. Unwin and I, having taken our morning walk and returning homeward through

¹ "The charges and the answers of Hastings were first read. This ceremony occupied two whole days, and was rendered less

the wilderness, met the Throckmortons. A minute after we had met them, we heard the cry of hounds at no great distance, and mounting the broad stump of an elm which had been felled, and by the aid of which we were enabled to look over the wall, we saw them. They were all at that time in our orchard; presently we heard a terrier, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton, which you may remember by the name of Fury, yelping with much vehemence, and saw her running through the thickets within a few yards of us at her utmost speed, as if in pursuit of something which we doubted not was the fox. Before we could reach the other end of the wilderness, the hounds entered also; and when we arrived at the gate which opens into the grove, there we found the whole weary cavalcade assembled. The huntsman dismounting, begged leave to follow his hounds on foot, for he was sure, he said, that they had killed him: a conclusion which I suppose he drew from their profound silence. He was accordingly admitted, and with a sagacity that would not have dishonoured the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken, though he had never had a glimpse of either after their first entrance through the rails, arrived where he found the slaughtered prey. He soon produced dead reynard, and rejoined us in the grove with all his dogs about him. Having an

tedious than it would otherwise have been by the silver voice and just emphasis of Cowper, the clerk of the court, a near relative of the amiable poet."—MACAULAY, *Essay on Warren Hastings*. The poet addressed a sonnet to Henry Cowper on this occasion.

opportunity to see a ceremony, which I was pretty sure would never fall in my way again, I determined to stay and to notice all that passed with the most minute attention. The huntsman having by the aid of a pitchfork lodged reynard on the arm of an elm, at the height of about nine feet from the ground, there left him for a considerable time. The gentlemen sat on their horses contemplating the fox, for which they had toiled so hard ; and the hounds assembled at the foot of the tree, with faces not less expressive of the most rational delight, contemplated the same object. The huntsman remounted ; cut off a foot, and threw it to the hounds ;—one of them swallowed it whole like a bolus. He then once more alighted, and drawing down the fox by the hinder legs, desired the people, who were by this time rather numerous, to open a lane for him to the right and left. He was instantly obeyed, when throwing the fox to the distance of some yards, and screaming like a fiend, “tear him to pieces”—at least six times repeatedly, he consigned him over absolutely to the pack, who in a few minutes devoured him completely. Thus, my dear, as Virgil says, what none of the gods could have ventured to promise me, time itself, pursuing its accustomed course, has of its own accord presented me with. I have been in at the death of a fox, and you now know as much of the matter as I, who am as well informed as any sportsman in England.—Yours,

W. C

CCXVIII

*To Mrs. King.*WESTON UNDERWOOD,
March 3, 1788.

I owe you many acknowledgments, dear madam, for that unreserved communication, both of your history and of your sentiments, with which you favoured me in your last. It gives me great pleasure to learn that you are so happily circumstanced, both in respect of situation and frame of mind. With your view of religious subjects, you could not indeed, speaking properly, be pronounced unhappy in any circumstances; but to have received from above not only that faith which reconciles the heart to affliction, but many outward comforts also, and especially that greatest of all earthly comforts, a comfortable home, is happiness indeed. May you long enjoy it! As to health or sickness, you have learned already their true value, and know well that the former is no blessing, unless it be sanctified, and that the latter is one of the greatest we can receive, when we are enabled to make a proper use of it.

There is nothing in my story that can possibly be worth your knowledge; yet, lest I should seem to treat you with a reserve which, at your hands, I have not experienced, such as it is, I will relate it.—I was bred to the law; a profession to which I was never much inclined, and in which I engaged rather

because I was desirous to gratify a most indulgent father, than because I had any hopes of success in it myself. I spent twelve years in the Temple, where I made no progress in that science, to cultivate which I was sent thither. During this time my father died. Not long after him, died my mother-in-law; and at the expiration of it, a melancholy seized me, which obliged me to quit London, and consequently to renounce the bar. I lived some time at St. Alban's. After having suffered in that place long and extreme affliction, the storm was suddenly dispelled, and the same day-spring from on high which has arisen upon you, arose on me also. I spent eight years in the enjoyment of it; and have ever since the expiration of those eight years, been occasionally the prey of the same melancholy as at first. In the depths of it I wrote *The Task*, and the volume which preceded it; and in the same deeps am now translating Homer. But to return to Saint Alban's. I abode there a year and half. Thence I went to Cambridge, where I spent a short time with my brother, in whose neighbourhood I determined, if possible, to pass the remainder of my days. He soon found a lodging for me at Huntingdon. At that place I had not resided long, when I was led to an intimate connexion with a family of the name of Unwin. I soon quitted my lodging, and took up my abode with them. I had not lived long under their roof, when Mr. Unwin, as he was riding one Sunday morning to his cure at Gravely, was thrown

from his horse ; of which fall he died. Mrs. Unwin having the same views of the gospel as myself, and being desirous of attending a purer ministration of it than was to be found at Huntingdon, removed to Olney, where Mr. Newton was at that time the preacher, and I with her. There we continued till Mr. Newton, whose family was the only one in the place with which we could have a connexion, and with whom we lived always on the most intimate terms, left it. After his departure, finding the situation no longer desirable, and our house threatening to fall upon our heads, we removed hither. Here we have a good house, in a most beautiful village, and, for the greatest part of the year, a most agreeable neighbourhood. Like you, madam, I stay much at home, and have not travelled twenty miles from this place and its environs, more than once these twenty years.

All this I have written, not for the singularity of the matter, as you will perceive, but partly for the reason which I gave at the outset, and partly that, seeing we are become correspondents, we may know as much of each other as we can, and that as soon as possible.

I beg, madam, that you will present my best respects to Mr. King, whom, together with yourself, should you at any time hereafter take wing for a longer flight than usual, we shall be happy to receive at Weston ; and believe me, dear madam, his and your obliged and affectionate,

W. C.

CCXIX

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, March 12, 1788.

Slavery, and *The Manners of the Great*, I have read. The former I admired, as I do all that Miss More writes, as well for energy of expression as for the tendency of the design. I have never yet seen any production of her pen that has not recommended itself by both these qualifications. There is likewise much good sense in her manner of treating every subject, and no mere poetic cant (which is the thing that I abhor,) in her manner of treating any. And this I say, not because you now know and visit her, but it has long been my avowed opinion of her works, which I have both spoken and written, as often as I have had occasion to mention them. . . .

We shall now soon lose our neighbours at the Hall. We shall truly miss them, and long for their return. Mr. Throckmorton said to me last night, with sparkling eyes, and a face expressive of the highest pleasure—"We compared you this morning with Pope; we read your fourth *Iliad* and his, and I verily think we shall beat him. He has many superfluous lines, and does not interest one. When I read your translation, I am deeply affected. I see plainly your advantage, and am convinced that Pope spoiled all by attempting the work in rhyme." His brother George, who is my most active amanuensis,

and who indeed first introduced the subject, seconded all he said. More would have passed, but Mrs. Throckmorton having seated herself at the harpsichord, and for my amusement merely, my attention was of course turned to her. The new vicar of Olney is arrived, and we have exchanged visits. He is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much. A treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value.

W. C.

CCXX

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, *March 29, 1788.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I rejoice that you have so successfully performed so long a journey without the aid of hoofs or wheels. I do not know that a journey on foot exposes a man to more disasters than a carriage or a horse ; perhaps it may be the safer way of travelling, but the novelty of it impressed me with some anxiety on your account.

It seems almost incredible to myself that my company should be at all desirable to you, or to any man. I know so little of the world as it goes at present, and labour generally under such a depression of spirits, especially at those times when I could wish to be most cheerful, that my own share in every conversation appears to me to be the most

insipid thing imaginable. But you say you found it otherwise, and I will not for my own sake doubt your sincerity: *de gustibus non est disputandum*, and since such is yours, I shall leave you in quiet possession of it, wishing indeed both its continuance and increase. I shall not find a properer place in which to say, accept of Mrs. Unwin's acknowledgements, as well as mine, for the kindness of your expressions on this subject, and be assured of an undissembling welcome at all times, when it shall suit you to give us your company at Weston. As to her, she is one of the sincerest of the human race, and if she receives you with the appearance of pleasure, it is because she feels it. Her behaviour on such occasions is with her an affair of conscience, and she dares no more look a falsehood than utter one.

It is almost time to tell you that I have received the books safe, they have not suffered the least detriment by the way, and I am much obliged to you for them. If my translation should be a little delayed in consequence of this favour of yours, you must take the blame on yourself. It is impossible not to read the notes of a commentator so learned, so judicious, and of so fine a taste as Dr. Clarke, having him at one's elbow. Though he has been but a few hours under my roof, I have already peeped at him, and find that he will be *instar omnium* to me. They are such notes exactly as I wanted. A translator of Homer should ever have

somebody at hand to say, "that's a beauty," lest he should slumber where his author does not; not only depreciating, by such inadvertency, the work of his original, but depriving perhaps his own of an embellishment which wanted only to be noticed.

If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands, they are probably mine. It must be an honour to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble. I fear, however, that the attempt will fail. The tidings which have lately reached me from London concerning it, are not the most encouraging. While the matter slept, or was but slightly adverted to, the English only had their share of shame in common with other nations on account of it. But since it has been canvassed and searched to the bottom,—since the public attention has been riveted to the horrible scheme,—we can no longer plead either that we did not know it, or did not think of it. Wo be to us, if we refuse the poor captives the redress to which they have so clear a right, and prove ourselves in the sight of God and men indifferent to all considerations but those of gain.—
Adieu,

W. C.

CCXXI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *March 31, 1788.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Mrs. Throckmorton has promised to write to me. I beg that as often as you shall see her you will give her a smart pinch, and say, "Have you written to my cousin?" I build all my hopes of her performance on this expedient, and for so doing these my letters, not patent, shall be your sufficient warrant. You are thus to give her the question till she shall answer, "Yes."

I have written one more song, and sent it. It is called *The Morning Dream*, and may be sung to the tune of Tweed-Side, or any other tune that will suit it, for I am not nice on that subject. I would have copied it for you, had I not almost filled my sheet without it, but now, my dear, you must stay till the sweet sirens of London shall bring it to you, or if that happy day should never arrive, I hereby acknowledge myself your debtor to that amount. I shall now probably cease to sing of tortured negroes, a theme which never pleased me, but which, in the hope of doing them some little service, I was not unwilling to handle.

If any thing could have raised Miss More to a higher place in my opinion than she possessed before, it could only be your information that, after

all, she, and not Mr. Wilberforce, is author of that volume.¹ How comes it to pass, that she, being a woman, writes with a force, and energy, and a correctness hitherto arrogated by the men, and not very frequently displayed even by the men themselves!—Adieu,

W. C.

CCXXII

To Mrs. King.

WESTON UNDERWOOD,
April 11, 1788.

DEAR MADAM,

The melancholy that I have mentioned, and concerning which you are so kind as to inquire, is of a kind, so far as I know, peculiar to myself. It does not at all affect the operations of my mind on any subject to which I can attach it, whether serious or ludicrous, or whatsoever it may be; for which reason I am almost always employed either in reading or writing, when I am not engaged in conversation. A vacant hour is my abhorrence; because, when I am not occupied, I suffer under the whole influence of my unhappy temperament. I thank you for your recommendation of a medicine from which you have received benefit yourself; but there is hardly any thing that I have not proved, however beneficial it may have been found by

¹ *The Manners of the Great.* See above, p. 177.

others, in my own case utterly useless. I have, therefore, long since bid adieu to all hope from human means,—the means excepted of perpetual employment.

I will not say that we shall never meet, because it is not for a creature who knows not what shall be to-morrow, to assert any thing positively concerning the future. Things more unlikely I have yet seen brought to pass, and things which, if I had expressed my opinion of them at all, I should have said were impossible. But being respectively circumstanced as we are, there seems no present probability of it. You speak of insuperable hinderances; and I also have hinderances that would be equally difficult to surmount. One is, that I never ride, that I am not able to perform a journey on foot, and that chaises do not roll within the sphere of that economy which my circumstances oblige me to observe. If this were not of itself sufficient to excuse me, when I decline so obliging an invitation as yours, I could mention yet other obstacles. But to what end? One impracticability makes as effectual a barrier as a thousand. It will be otherwise in other worlds. Either we shall not bear about us a body, or it will be more easily transportable than this. In the mean time, by the help of the post, strangers to each other may cease to be such, as you and I have already begun to experience.

It is indeed, madam, as you say, a foolish world, and likely to continue such till the Great Teacher shall himself vouchsafe to make it wiser. I am per-

suaded that time alone will never mend it. But there is doubtless a day appointed when there shall be a more general manifestation of the beauty of holiness than mankind have ever yet beheld. When that period shall arrive, there will be an end of profane representations, whether of heaven or hell, on the stage ;—the great realities will supersede them.

I have just discovered that I have written to you on paper so transparent, that it will hardly keep the contents a secret. Excuse the mistake, and believe me, dear madam, with my respects to Mr. King, affectionately yours,

W. C.

CCXXIII

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

WESTON, May 8, 1788.

Alas ! my library !—I must now give it up for a lost thing for ever. The only consolation belonging to the circumstance is, or seems to be, that no such loss did ever befall any other man, or can ever befall me again. As far as books are concerned I am

Totus teres atque rotundus,

and may set fortune at defiance. The books which had been my father's had most of them his arms on the inside cover, but the rest no mark, neither his name nor mine. I could mourn for them like Sancho for his Dapple, but it would avail me nothing.

You will oblige me much by sending me *Crazy Kate*. A gentleman last winter promised me both her and the *Lace-maker*, but he went to London, that place in which, as in the grave, "all things are forgotten," and I have never seen either of them.

I begin to find some prospect of a conclusion, of the *Iliad* at least, now opening upon me, having reached the eighteenth book. Your letter found me yesterday in the very fact of dispersing the whole host of Troy by the voice only of Achilles. There is nothing extravagant in the idea, for you have witnessed a similar effect attending even such a voice as mine at midnight, from a garret window, on the dogs of a whole parish, whom I have put to flight in a moment.

W. C.

CCXXIV

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, May 19, 1788.

. . . . I beg that you will give my love to Mrs. Frog,¹ and tell her it is time she were gone to Bucklands. According to my reckoning, which I know to be very exact, she has already stayed her allotted time in London, where if she still continues frisking about, heedless how time goes, and is after all to take a frisk to Bucklands also, I shall be glad to know when we are likely to see her at the Hall

¹ Mrs. Throckmorton.

again? It is true that northerly winds have blown ever since she left us, but they have not prevented the most exuberant show of blossoms that ever was seen, nor the singing of nightingales in every hedge. Ah, my cousin, thou hast lost all these luxuries too, but not by choice, thine is an absence of necessity. The Wilderness is now in all its beauty: I would that thou wert here to enjoy it. Our guests leave us to-morrow. Fare thee well. Thanks for the two lists of subscribers, and for Mr. Vickery's most admirable puff.—Yours, my dearest, ever,

WM. COWPER.

CCXXV

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

May 24, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

For two excellent prints I return you my sincere acknowledgements. I cannot say that poor Kate resembles much the original, who was neither so young nor so handsome as the pencil has represented her; but she was a figure well suited to the account given of her in *The Task*,¹ and has a face exceedingly expressive of despairing melancholy. The lace-maker is accidentally a good likeness of a young woman, once our neighbour, who was hardly less handsome than the picture twenty years ago; but the loss of one

¹ *The Task*, book i., lines 534 *sqq.*

husband, and the acquisition of another, have since that time impaired her much ; yet she might still be supposed to have sat to the artist.

We dined yesterday with your friend and mine, the most companionable and domestic Mr. C——. The whole kingdom can hardly furnish a spectacle more pleasing to a man who has a taste for true happiness, than himself, Mrs. C——, and their multitudinous family. Seven long miles are interposed between us, or perhaps I should oftener have an opportunity of declaiming on this subject.

I am now in the nineteenth book of the *Iliad*, and on the point of displaying such feats of heroism performed by Achilles, as make all other achievements trivial. I may well exclaim, O ! for a muse of fire ! especially having not only a great host to cope with, but a great river also ; much however may be done, when Homer leads the way. I should not have chosen to have been the original author of such a business, even though all the nine had stood at my elbow. Time has wonderful effects. We admire that in an ancient, for which we should send a modern bard to Bedlam.

I saw at Mr. C——'s a great curiosity ; an antique bust of Paris in Parian marble. You will conclude that it interested me exceedingly. I pleased myself with supposing that it once stood in Helen's chamber. It was in fact brought from the Levant, and though not well mended (for it had suffered much by time) is an admirable performance.

W. C.

CCXXVI

*To Lady Hesketh.*THE LODGE, *June 3, 1788.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

The excessive heat of these last few days was indeed oppressive; but excepting the languor that it occasioned both in my mind and body, it was far from being prejudicial to me. It opened ten thousand pores, by which as many mischiefs, the effects of long obstruction, began to breathe themselves forth abundantly. Then came an east wind, baneful to me at all times, but following so closely such a sultry season, uncommonly noxious. To speak in the seaman's phrase, not entirely strange to you, *I was taken all aback*; and the humours which would have escaped, if old Eurys would have given them leave, finding every door shut, have fallen into my eyes. But in a country like this, poor miserable mortals must be content to suffer all that sudden and violent changes can inflict; and if they are quit for about half the plagues that Caliban calls down on Prospero, they may say we are well off, and dance for joy, if the rheumatism or cramp will let them.

Did you ever see an advertisement by one Fowle, a dancing-master of Newport Pagnel? If not, I will contrive to send it to you for your amusement. It is the most extravagantly ludicrous affair of the kind I ever saw. The author of it had the good hap to be

crazed, or he had never produced any thing half so clever ; for you will ever observe, that they who are said to have lost their wits, have more than other people. It is therefore only a slander, with which envy prompts the malignity of persons in their senses to asperse wittier than themselves. But there are countries in the world, where the mad have justice done them, where they are revered as the subjects of inspiration, and consulted as oracles. Poor Fowle would have made a figure there.

W. C.

CCXXVII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *June, 15, 1788.*

Although I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion,¹ yet, not hearing from you, I began to be uneasy on your account, and to fear that your health might have suffered by the fatigue, both of body and spirits, that you must have undergone, till a letter that reached me yesterday from the General set my heart at rest, so far as that cause of anxiety was in question. He speaks of my uncle in the tenderest terms, such as show how truly sensible he was of the amiableness and excellence of his character, and how deeply he regrets his loss. We have indeed lost one who has

¹ The death of her father, Ashley Cowper, the poet's uncle.

not left his like in the present generation of our family, and whose equal, in all respects, no future of it will probably produce. My memory retains so perfect an impression of him, that, had I been painter instead of poet, I could from those faithful traces have perpetuated his face and form with the most minute exactness; and this I the rather wonder at because some with whom I was equally conversant five-and-twenty years ago, have almost faded out of all recollection with me. But he made an impression not soon to be effaced, and was in figure, in temper, and manner, and in numerous other respects, such as I shall never behold again. I often think what a joyful interview there has been between him and some of his contemporaries, who went before him. The truth of the matter is, my dear, that they are the happy ones, and that we shall never be such ourselves till we have joined the party. Can there be any thing so worthy of our warmest wishes as to enter on an eternal, unchangeable state, in blessed fellowship and communion with those whose society we valued most, and for the best reasons, while they continued with us? A few steps more through a vain, foolish world, and this happiness will be yours. But be not hasty, my dear, to accomplish thy journey! For of all that live thou art one whom I can least spare; for thou also art one who shalt not leave thy equal behind thee.

W. C.

CCXXVIII

*To the Rev. Walter Bagot.*WESTON, *June 17, 1788.*

MY DEAR WALTER,

You think me, no doubt, a tardy correspondent, and such I am, but not willingly. Many hinderances have intervened, and the most difficult to surmount have been those which the east and north-east winds have occasioned, breathing winter upon the roses of June, and inflaming my eyes, ten times more sensible of the inconvenience than they. The vegetables of England seem, like our animals, of a hardier and bolder nature than those of other countries. In France and Italy flowers blow, because it is warm, but here, in spite of the cold. The season however is somewhat mended at present, and my eyes with it. Finding myself this morning in perfect ease of body, I seize the welcome opportunity to do something at least towards the discharge of my arrears to you.

I am glad that you liked my song, and, if I liked the others myself so well as that I sent you, I would transcribe for you them also. But I sent *that*, because I accounted it the best. Slavery, and especially negro slavery, because the cruelest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme. But besides that it would be in some sort treason against Homer to abandon him for other matter, I felt myself so much

hurt in my spirits the moment I entered on the contemplation of it, that I have at last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror, on which my imagination can dwell, not without some complacence. But then they are such scenes as God and not man, produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb, there is such meanness in the design, and such cruelty in the execution, that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of poetry to employ her in the description of it. I hope also that the generality of my countrymen have more generosity in their nature than to want the fiddle of verse to go before them in the performance of an act to which they are invited by the loudest calls of humanity.

Breakfast calls, and then Homer.—Ever yours,

W. C.

Erratum.—Instead of Mr. Wilberforce as author of *Manners of the Great*, read Hannah More.

My paper mourns, and my seal. It is for the death of a venerable uncle, Ashley Cowper, at the age of eighty-seven.

CCXXIX

To Mrs. King.

WESTON UNDERWOOD,
June 19, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,

You must think me a tardy correspondent, unless you have had charity enough for me to suppose that I have met with other hinderances than those of indolence and inattention. With these I cannot charge myself, for I am never idle by choice ; and inattentive to you I certainly have not been ; but, on the contrary, can safely affirm that every day I have thought on you. My silence has been occasioned by a malady to which I have all my life been subject—an inflammation of the eyes. The last sudden change of weather, from excessive heat to a wintry degree of cold, occasioned it, and at the same time gave me a pinch of the rheumatic kind ; from both which disorders I have but just recovered. I do not suppose that our climate has been much altered since the days of our forefathers, the Picts ; but certainly the human constitution in this country has been altered much. Innured as we are from our cradles to every vicissitude in a climate more various than any other, and in possession of all that modern refinement has been able to contrive for our security, we are yet as subject to blights as the tenderest blossoms of spring ; and are so well admonished of every change in the atmosphere by our

bodily feelings, as hardly to have any need of a weather-glass to mark them. For this we are, no doubt, indebted to the multitude of our accommodations ; for it was not possible to retain the hardness that originally belonged to our race, under the delicate management to which for many ages we have now been accustomed. I can hardly doubt that a bull-dog or a game-cock might be made just as susceptible of injuries from weather as myself, were he dieted and in all respects accommodated as I am. Or if the project did not succeed in the first instance (for we ourselves did not become what we are at once), in process of time, however, and in a course of many generations it would certainly take effect. Let such a dog be fed in his infancy with pap, Naples biscuit, and boiled chicken ; let him be wrapped in flannel at night, sleep on a good feather-bed, and ride out in a coach for an airing ; and if his posterity do not become slight-limbed, puny, and valetudinarian, it will be a wonder. Thus our parents, and their parents, and the parents of both were managed ; and thus ourselves ; and the consequence is, that instead of being weather-proof, even without clothing, furs and flannels are not warm enough to defend us. It is observable, however, that though we have by these means lost much of our pristine vigour, our days are not the fewer. We live as long as those whom, on account of the sturdiness of their frame, the poets suppose to have been the progeny of oaks. Perhaps too they had little feeling, and for that reason also might be imagined to be so descended : for a

very robust athletic habit seems inconsistent with much sensibility. But sensibility is the *sine quâ non* of real happiness. If, therefore, our lives have not been shortened, and if our feelings have been rendered more exquisite as our habit of body has become more delicate, on the whole, perhaps, we have no cause to complain, but are rather gainers by our degeneracy.

Do you consider what you do, when you ask one poet his opinion of another? Yet I think I can give you an honest answer to your question, and without the least wish to nibble. Thomson was admirable in description; but it always seemed to me that there was somewhat of affectation in his style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonized. I could wish too, with Dr. Johnson, that he had confined himself to this country; for when he describes what he never saw, one is forced to read him with some allowance for possible misrepresentation. He was, however, a true poet, and his lasting fame has proved it.—Believe me, my dear madam, with my best respects to Mr. King, most truly yours,

W. C.

P.S.—I am extremely sorry that you have been so much indisposed, and hope that your next will bring me a more favourable account of your health. I know not why, but I rather suspect that you do not allow yourself sufficient air and exercise. The physicians call them non-naturals, I suppose to deter their patients from the use of them.

CCXXX

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, June 27, 1788.

For the sake of a longer visit, my dearest coz, I can be well content to wait. The country, this country at least, is pleasant at all times, and when winter is come, or near at hand, we shall have the better chance for being snug. I know your passion for retirement indeed, or for what we call *deedy* retirement, and the F——s intending to return to Bath with their mother, when her visit at the Hall is over, you will then find here exactly the retirement in question. I have made in the orchard the best winter-walk in all the parish, sheltered from the east, and from the north-east, and open to the sun, except at his rising, all the day. Then we will have Homer and *Don Quixote* : and then we will have saunter and chat, and one laugh more before we die. Our orchard is alive with creatures of all kinds ; poultry of every denomination swarms in it, and pigs, the drollest in the world !

I rejoice that we have a cousin Charles also, as well as a cousin Henry, who has had the address to win the good-likings of the Chancellor. May he fare the better for it ! As to myself, I have long since ceased to have any expectations from that quarter. Yet if he were indeed mortified as you say (and no doubt you have particular reasons for thinking so,) and repented to that degree of his hasty exertions in favour

of the present occupant, who can tell? he wants neither means nor management, but can easily at some future period redress the evil, if he chooses to do it. But in the mean time life steals away, and shortly neither he will be in circumstances to do me a kindness, nor I to receive one at his hands. Let him make haste therefore, or he will die a promise in my debt, which he will never be able to perform. Your communications on this subject are as safe as you can wish them. We divulge nothing but what might appear in the magazine, nor that without great consideration.

I must tell you a feat of my dog Beau. Walking by the river side, I observed some water-lilies floating at a little distance from the bank. They are a large white flower, with an orange coloured eye, very beautiful. I had a desire to gather one, and, having your long cane in my hand, by the help of it endeavoured to bring one of them within my reach. But the attempt proved vain, and I walked forward. Beau had all the while observed me very attentively. Returning soon after toward the same place, I observed him plunge into the river, while I was about forty yards distant from him; and, when I had nearly reached the spot, he swam to land with a lily in his mouth, which he came and laid at my foot.

Mr. Rose, whom I have mentioned to you as a visitor of mine for the first time soon after you left us, writes me word that he has seen my ballads against the slave-mongers, but not in print. Where he met with them, I know not. Mr. Bull begged hard for leave to print

them at Newport-Pagnel, and I refused, thinking that it would be wrong to anticipate the nobility, gentry, and others, at whose pressing instance I composed them, in their design to print them. But perhaps I need not have been so squeamish ; for the opportunity to publish them in London seems now not only ripe, but rotten. I am well content. There is but one of them with which I am myself satisfied, though I have heard them all well spoken of. But there are very few things of my own composition, that I can endure to read, when they have been written a month, though at first they seem to me to be all perfection.

Mrs. Unwin, who has been much the happier since the time of your return hither has been in some sort settled, begs me to make her kindest remembrance.

—Yours, my dear, most truly,

W. C.

CCXXXI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *July 28, 1788.*

It is in vain that you tell me you have no talent at description, while in fact you describe better than any body. You have given me a most complete idea of your mansion and its situation ; and I doubt not that with your letter in my hand by way of map, could I be set down on the spot in a moment, I should find myself qualified to take my walks and my pastime in

whatever quarter of your paradise it should please me the most to visit. We also, as you know, have scenes at Weston worthy of description ; but because you know them well, I will only say that one of them has, within these few days, been much improved ; I mean the lime walk. By the help of the axe and the wood-bill, which have of late been constantly employed in cutting out all straggling branches that intercepted the arch, Mr. Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness, that no cathedral in the world can show one of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it ; for were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while to visit it, merely as an object of taste ; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom both to the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure grounds have displaced without mercy, because, forsooth, they are rectilinear ! It is a wonder they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason.

Have you seen the account of Five hundred celebrated authors now living ? I am one of them ; but stand charged with the high crime and misdemeanor of totally neglecting method ; an accusation which, if the gentleman would take the pains to read me, he would find sufficiently refuted. I am conscious at least myself of having laboured much in the arrangement of my matter, and of having given to the several parts of my book of *The Task*, as well as to each poem in the first volume, that sort of slight connexion which

poetry demands ; for in poetry, (except professedly of the didactic kind) a logical precision would be stiff, pedantic, and ridiculous. But there is no pleasing some critics ; the comfort is, that I am contented, whether they be pleased or not. At the same time, to my honour be it spoken, the chronicler of us five hundred prodigies bestows on me, for aught I know, more commendations than on any other of my confraternity. May he live to write the histories of as many thousand poets, and find me the very best among them ! Amen !

I join with you, my dearest coz, in wishing that I owned the fee simple of all the beautiful scenes around you, but such emoluments were never designed for poets. Am I not happier than ever poet was, in having thee for my cousin, and in the expectation of thy arrival here whenever Strawberry Hill shall lose thee ?—Ever thine,

W. C.

CCXXXII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *August 9, 1788.*

The Newtons are still here, and continue with us I believe until the fifteenth of the month. Here is also my friend, Mr. Rose, a valuable young man, who, attracted by the effluvia of my genius, found me out in my retirement last January twelvemonth. I have

not permitted him to be idle, but have made him transcribe for me the twelfth book of the *Iliad*. He brings me the compliments of several of the literati, with whom he is acquainted in town, and tells me, that from Dr. Maclaine, whom he saw lately, he learns that my book is in the hands of sixty different persons at the Hague, who are all enchanted with it, not forgetting the said Dr. Maclaine himself, who tells him that he reads it every day, and is always the better for it. O rare we !

I have been employed this morning in composing a Latin motto for the King's clock ; the embellishments of which are by Mr. Bacon. That gentleman breakfasted with us on Wednesday, having come thirty-seven miles out of his way on purpose to see your cousin. At his request I have done it, and have made two : he will choose that which liketh him best. Mr. Bacon is a most excellent man, and a most agreeable companion : I would that he lived not so remote, or that he had more opportunity of travelling.

There is not, so far as I know, a syllable of the rhyming correspondence between me and my poor brother left, save and except the six lines of it quoted in yours. I *had* the whole of it, but it perished in the wreck of a thousand other things, when I left the Temple. Breakfast calls. Adieu !

W. C.

CCXXXIII

*To Mrs. King.*WESTON UNDERWOOD,
Aug. 28, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,

Should you discard me from the number of your correspondents, you would treat me as I seem to deserve, though I do not actually deserve it. I have lately been engaged with company at our house, who resided with us five weeks, and have had much of the rheumatism into the bargain. Not in my fingers, you will say:—True. But you know as well as I, that pain, be it where it may, indisposes us to writing.

You express some degree of wonder that I found you out to be sedentary, at least much a stayer within doors, without any sufficient data for my direction. Now if I should guess your figure and stature with equal success, you will deem me not only a poet but a conjurer. Yet in fact I have no pretensions of that sort. I have only formed a picture of you in my own imagination, as we ever do of a person of whom we think much, though we have never seen that person. Your height I conceive to be about five feet five inches, which, though it would make a short man, is yet height enough for a woman. If you insist on an inch or two more, I have no objection. You are not very fat, but somewhat inclined to be fat, and unless you allow yourself a little more air and exercise, will incur some

danger of exceeding in your dimensions before you die. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to you to walk a little more, at least in your garden, and to amuse yourself occasionally with pulling up here and there a weed, for it will be an inconvenience to you to be much fatter than you are, at a time of life when your strength will be naturally on the decline. I have given you a fair complexion, a slight tinge of the rose in your cheeks, dark brown hair, and, if the fashion would give you leave to show it, an open and well-formed forehead. To all this I add a pair of eyes not quite black, but nearly approaching to that hue, and very animated. I have not absolutely determined on the shape of your nose, or the form of your mouth; but should you tell me that I have in other respects drawn a tolerable likeness, have no doubt but I can describe them too. I assure you that though I have a great desire to read him, I have never seen Lavater, nor have availed myself in the least of any of his rules on this occasion. Ah, madam! if with all that sensibility of yours, which exposes you to so much sorrow, and necessarily must expose you to it, in a world like this, I have had the good fortune to make you smile, I have then painted you, whether with a strong resemblance, or with none at all, to very good purpose.

I had intended to have sent you a little poem, which I have lately finished, but have no room to transcribe it. You shall have it by another opportunity. Breakfast is on the table, and my time also fails, as well as my paper. I rejoice that a cousin of yours found my

volumes agreeable to him, for, being your cousin, I will be answerable for his good taste and judgment.

When I wrote last, I was in mourning for a dear and much-valued uncle, Ashley Cowper. He died at the age of eighty-six. My best respects attend Mr. King ; and, I am, dear madam, most truly yours,

W. C.

CCXXXIV

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *Sept. 13, 1788.*

MY DEAREST COZ,

Beau seems to have objections against my writing to you this morning that are not to be overruled. He will be in my lap, licking my face, and nibbling the end of my pen. Perhaps he means to say, I beg you will give my love to her, which I therefore send you accordingly. There cannot be, this hinderance excepted, a situation more favourable to the business I have in hand than mine at this moment. Here is no noise, *save* (as the poets always express it) that of the birds hopping on their perches and playing with their wires, while the sun glimmering through the elm opposite the window falls on my desk with all the softness of moonshine. There is not a cloud in the sky, nor a leaf that moves, so that over and above the enjoyment of the purest calm, I feel a well-warranted expectation that such as the day is, it will be to its end. This is the month in which such weather is to

be expected, and which is therefore welcome to me beyond all others, October excepted, which promises to bring you hither. At your coming you will probably find us, and us only, or, to speak more properly, *uzz*. The Frogs,¹ as I told you, hop into Norfolk soon, on a visit to Lord Petre, who beside his palace in Essex, has another in that county. All the brothers are now at the Hall, *save* the physician, who is employed in prescribing medicine to the Welsh at Cardiff. There lives he with *madame son épouse*, with an income of three hundred pounds a year,—all happiness and contentment. The mother is also here; and here is also our uncle Gifford,—a man whom if you know you must love, and if you do not, I wish you did. But he goes this morning, and I expect every minute to see him pass my window. In volubility, variety, and earnestness of expression, he very much resembles your father, and in the sweetness of his temper too; so that though he be but a passenger, or rather a bird of passage, for his head-quarters are in France, and he only flits occasionally to England, he has much engaged my affections. I walked with him yesterday on a visit to an oak on the borders of Yardley Chase, an oak which I often visit, and which is one of the wonders that I show to all who come this way, and have never seen it. I tell them all that it is a thousand years old, verily believing it to be so, though I do not know it. A mile beyond this oak stands another, which has for time immemorial been known

¹ The Throckmortons.

by the name of Judith, and is said to have been an oak when my namesake the Conqueror first came hither. And beside all this, there is a good coach-way to them both, and I design that you shall see them too.

A day or two before the arrival of your last letter we were agreeably surprised by that of a hamper, stuffed with various articles in the grocery way, corresponding exactly with a bill of parcels which accompanied them. Though we had received no advice of the same, we were not at all at a loss for the sender, and hereby, my dear, make you our very best acknowledgements for your kind present. Having had company this summer, and being also obliged now and then to feed the Frogs, our stock of hams and tongues is not, at present much ;—one of the former and two of the latter making up our whole store in that way.

I have as yet no news from the Chancellor. It is possible that none I may have till he can send me good ; for to me it seems that after having expressed for me so much warmth of friendship still subsisting, he has laid himself under pretty strong obligations to do something for me, if any thing can be done. But though in my time my rest has been broken by many things, it never was yet by the desire of riches, or the dread of poverty. At the same time I have no objection to all that he can do for me, be it ever so much.

I am going this morning with the Dowager Frog to Chicheley, on a visit to the Chesters, which obliges me to shorten my scribble somewhat. Unless I finish

my letter first you will not get it by this post. Therefore farewell, my dear: may God keep thee, and give us a joyful meeting;—so pray we both. Amen.—Ever thine,

WM. C.

CCXXXV

To Mrs. King.

WESTON UNDERWOOD,
Oct. 11, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,

You are perfectly secure from all danger of being overwhelmed with presents from me. It is not much that a poet can possibly have it in his power to give. When he has presented his own works, he may be supposed to have exhausted all means of donation. They are his only superfluity. There was a time, but that time was before I commenced writer for the press, when I amused myself in a way somewhat similar to yours; allowing, I mean, for the difference between masculine and female operations. The scissors and the needle are your chief implements; mine were the chisel and the saw. In those days you might have been in some danger of too plentiful a return for your favours. Tables, such as they were, and joint stools such as never were, might have travelled to Pertenhall in most inconvenient abundance. But I have long since discontinued this practice, and many others which I found it necessary to adopt, that I might escape the worst of all evils, both in itself and in its consequences

—an idle life. Many arts I have exercised with this view, for which nature never designed me ; though among them were some in which I arrived at considerable proficiency, by mere dint of the most heroic perseverance. There is not a 'squire in all this country who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or bird-cages, than myself ; and in the article of cabbage-nets, I had no superior. I even had the hardiness to take in hand the pencil, and studied a whole year the art of drawing. Many figures were the fruit of my labours, which had, at least, the merit of being unparalleled by any production either of art or nature. But before the year was ended, I had occasion to wonder at the progress that may be made, in despite of natural deficiency, by dint alone of practice ; for I actually produced three landscapes, which a lady thought worthy to be framed and glazed. I then judged it high time to exchange this occupation for another, lest, by any subsequent productions of inferior merit, I should forfeit the honour I had so fortunately acquired. But gardening was, of all employments, that in which I succeeded best ; though even in this I did not suddenly attain perfection. I began with lettuces and cauliflowers : from them I proceeded to cucumbers ; next to melons. I then purchased an orange-tree, to which, in due time, I added two or three myrtles. These served me day and night with employment during a whole severe winter. To defend them from the frost, in a situation that exposed them to its severity, cost me much in-

genuity and much attendance. I contrived to give them a fire heat ; and have waded night after night through the snow, with the bellows under my arm, just before going to bed, to give the latest possible puff to the embers, lest the frost should seize them before morning. Very minute beginnings have sometimes important consequences. From nursing two or three little evergreens, I became ambitious of a green-house, and accordingly built one ; which, verse excepted, afforded me amusement for a longer time than any expedient of all the many to which I have fled for refuge from the misery of having nothing to do. When I left Olney for Weston, I could no longer have a green-house of my own ; but in a neighbour's garden I find a better, of which the sole management is consigned to me.

I had need take care, when I begin a letter, that the subject with which I set off be of some importance ; for before I can exhaust it, be it what it may, I have generally filled my paper. But self is a subject inexhaustible, which is the reason that though I have said little, and nothing, I am afraid, worth your hearing, I have only room to add, that I am, my dear Madam, most truly yours,

W. C.

Mrs. Unwin bids me present her best compliments, and say how much she shall be obliged to you for the receipt to make that most excellent cake which came hither in its native pan. There is no production of yours that will not be always most welcome at Weston.

CCXXXVI

To the Rev. John Newton.

Nov. 29, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Not to fill my paper with apologies, I will only say, that you know my occupation, and how little time it leaves me for other employments, in which, had I leisure for them, I could take much pleasure. Letter-writing would be one of the most agreeable, and especially writing to you. It happens too that at this season of the year I lie in bed later than when the days are not so short; not for the sake of indulgence, but through necessity; for the servants lying later too, there is no room for me below till near nine o'clock. Thus is my time, that part of it which I give to my correspondents, sadly abridged, so that I am at this moment in debt to them all, except one who lives in Ireland. I have occasionally however heard of your well-being; you would otherwise, notwithstanding all these hinderances, have received at least a line or two, could I have sent no more. I know too that you have heard of mine; or if not of my *well-being*, at least of my being *as well* as when you saw me. . . .

If you find many blots, and my writing illegible, you must pardon them in consideration of the cause. Lady Hesket and Mrsh. Unwin are both talking as if they designed to make themselves amends for the silence they are enjoined while I sit translating

Homer. Mrs. Unwin is preparing the breakfast, and not having seen each other since they parted to go to bed, they have consequently a deal to communicate. . . .

The winter is gliding merrily away while my cousin is with us. She annihilates the difference between cold and heat, gloomy skies and cloudless. Mrs. Unwin is well, and joins me in the most affectionate remembrances of the trio in Coleman's Buildings. I have written I know not what, and with the despatch of legerdemain; but with the utmost truth and consciousness of what I say, assure you, my dear friend, that I am, ever yours,

W. C.

CCXXXVII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, Nov. 30, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Your letter, accompanying the books with which you have favoured me, and for which I return you a thousand thanks, did not arrive till yesterday. I shall have great pleasure in taking now and then a peep at my old friend Vincent Bourne; the neatest of all men in his versification, though when I was under his ushership, at Westminster, the most slovenly in his person. He was so inattentive to his boys, and so indifferent whether they brought him good or bad exercises, or none at all, that he seemed determined, as he was the best, so to be the last Latin poet of

the Westminster line ; a plot which, I believe, he executed very successfully ; for I have not heard of any who has at all deserved to be compared with him.

We have had hardly any rain or snow since you left us ; the roads are accordingly as dry as in the middle of summer, and the opportunity of walking much more favourable. We have no season in my mind so pleasant as such a winter : and I account it particularly fortunate that such it proves, my cousin being with us. She is in good health, and cheerful, so are we all ; and this I say, knowing you will be glad to hear it, for you have seen the time when this could not be said of all your friends at Weston. We shall rejoice to see you here at Christmas ; but I recollected when I hinted such an excursion by word of mouth, you gave me no great encouragement to expect you. Minds alter, and yours may be of the number of those that do so ; and if it should, you will be entirely welcome to us all. Were there no other reason for your coming than merely the pleasure it will afford to us, that reason alone would be sufficient ; but after so many toils, and with so many more in prospect, it seems essential to your well-being that you should allow yourself a respite, which perhaps you can take as comfortably, (I am sure as quietly,) here as anywhere.

The ladies beg to be remembered to you with all possible esteem and regard ; they are just come down to breakfast, and being at this moment extremely talkative, oblige me to put an end to my letter. Adieu.

W. C.

CCXXXVIII

*To Mrs. King.*WESTON UNDERWOOD,
Dec. 6, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,

It must, if you please, be a point agreed between us, that we will not make punctuality in writing the test of our regard for each other, lest we should incur the danger of pronouncing and suffering by an unjust sentence, and this mutually. I have told you, I believe, that the half hour before breakfast is my only letter-writing opportunity. In summer I rise rather early, and consequently at that season can find more time for scribbling than at present. If I enter my study now before nine, I find all at sixes and sevens; for servants will take, in part at least, the liberty claimed by their masters. That you may not suppose us all sluggards alike, it is necessary, however, that I should add a word or two on this subject, in justification of Mrs. Unwin, who, because the days are too short for the important concerns of knitting stockings and mending them, rises generally by candle-light; a practice so much in the style of all the ladies of antiquity who were good for any thing, that it is impossible not to applaud it.

Mrs. Battison being dead, I began to fear that you would have no more calls to Bedford; but the marriage, so near at hand, of the young lady you mention with a gentleman of that place, gives me

hope again that you may occasionally approach us as heretofore, and that on some of those occasions you will perhaps find your way to Weston. The deaths of some and the marriages of others make a new world of it every thirty years. Within that space of time, the majority are displaced, and a new generation has succeeded. Here and there one is permitted to stay a little longer, that there may not be wanting a few grave dons like myself, to make the observation. This thought struck me very forcibly the other day, on reading a paper, called *The County Chronicle*, which came hither in the package of some books from London. It contained news from Hertfordshire, and informed me, among other things, that at Great Berkhamstead, the place of my birth, there is hardly a family left of all those with whom, in my earlier days, I was so familiar. The houses, no doubt, remain, but the inhabitants are only to be found now by their grave-stones; and it is certain that I might pass through a town, in which I was once a sort of principal figure, unknowing and unknown. They are happy who have not taken up their rest in a world fluctuating as the sea, and passing away with the rapidity of a river. I wish from my heart that yourself and Mr. King may long continue, as you have already long continued, exceptions from the general truth of this remark. You doubtless married early, and the thirty-six years elapsed may have yet other years to succeed them. I do not forget that your relation Mrs. Battison lived to the age of eighty-six. I am

glad of her longevity, because it seems to afford some assurance of yours ; and I hope to know you better yet before you die.

Should you again dream of an interview with me, I hope you will have the precaution to shut all doors and windows, that no such impertinents as those you mention may intrude a second time. It is hard that people who never meet awake, cannot come together even in sleep without disturbance. We might, I think, be ourselves untroubled, at a time when we are so incapable of giving trouble to others, even had we the inclination.

I have never seen *The Observer*, but am pleased with being handsomely spoken of by an old school-fellow. Cumberland and I boarded together in the same house at Westminster. He was at that time clever, and I suppose has given proof sufficient to the world that he is still clever : but of all that he has written, it has never fallen in my way to read a syllable, except perhaps in a magazine or review, the sole sources, at present, of all my intelligence. Addison speaks of persons who grow dumb in the study of eloquence, and I have actually studied Homer till I am become a mere ignoramus in every other province of literature.

An almost general cessation of egg-laying among the hens has made it impossible for Mrs. Unwin to enterprise a cake. She, however, returns you a thousand thanks for the receipt ; and being now furnished with the necessary ingredients, will begin directly. My letter-writing time is spent, and I must

now to Homer. With my best respects to Mr. King, I remain, dear Madam, most affectionately yours,

W. C.

When I wrote last, I told you, I believe, that Lady Hesketh was with us. She is with us now, making a cheerful winter for us at Weston. The acquisition of a new friend, and, at a late day, the recovery of the friend of our youth, are two of the chief comforts of which this life is susceptible.

CCXXXIX

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, Jan. 19, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have taken, since you went away, many of the walks which we have taken together; and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you. I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect, by the help of a tree or a stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pocket; what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance; and this is a sort of *memoria technica*, which I would recommend to you, if I did not know that you have no occasion for it.

I am reading Sir John Hawkins,¹ and still hold the same opinion of his book, as when you were here. There are in it, undoubtedly, some awkwardnesses of phrase, and which is worse, here and there some unequivocal indications of a vanity not easily pardonable in a man of his years; but on the whole I find it amusing, and to me at least, to whom every thing that has passed in the literary world within these five-and-twenty years is new, sufficiently replete with information. Mr. Throckmorton told me about three days since, that it was lately recommended to him by a sensible man, as a book that would give him great insight into the history of modern literature, and modern men of letters, a commendation which I really think it merits. Fifty years hence, perhaps, the world will feel itself obliged to him.

W. C.

CCXL

To Mrs. King.

WESTON, Jan. 29, 1789.

MY DEAR MADAM,

This morning I said to Mrs. Unwin, "I must write to Mrs. King: her long silence alarms me—something has happened." These words of mine proved only a prelude to the arrival of your messenger with his most welcome charge, for which I return you my

¹ *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, by Sir John Hawkins, London, 1787. See below, pp. 224, 225.

sincerest thanks. You have sent me the very things I wanted, and which I should have continued to want, had not you sent them. As often as the wine is set on the table, I have said to myself, This is all very well ; but I have no bottle-stands : and myself as often replied, No matter ; you can make shift without them. Thus I and myself have conferred together many a day ; and you, as if you had been privy to the conference, have kindly supplied the deficiency, and put an end to the debate for ever.

When your messenger arrived I was beginning to dress for dinner, being engaged to dine with my neighbour Mr. Throckmorton, from whose house I am just returned, and snatch a few moments before supper to tell you how much I am obliged to you. You will not, therefore, find me very prolix at present ; but it shall not be long before you shall hear further from me. Your honest old neighbour sleeps under our roof, and will be gone in the morning before I shall have seen him.

I have more items than one by which to remember the late frost : it has cost me the bitterest uneasiness. Mrs. Unwin got a fall on the gravel-walk covered with ice, which has confined her to an upper chamber ever since. She neither broke nor dislocated any bones ; but received such a contusion below the hip, as crippled her completely. She now begins to recover, after having been helpless as a child for a whole fortnight ; but so slowly at present, that her amendment is even now almost imperceptible.

Engaged, however, as I am with my own private anxieties, I yet find leisure to interest myself not a little in the distresses of the Royal Family, especially in those of the Queen. The Lord Chancellor called the other morning on Lord Stafford: entering the room, he threw his hat on the sofa at the fireside, and clasping his hand, said, I have heard of distress, and I have read of it; but I never saw distress equal to that of the Queen. This I know from particular and certain authority.

My dear Madam, I have not time to enlarge at present on this subject, or to touch any other. Once more, therefore, thanking you for your kindness, of which I am truly sensible; and thanking, too, Mr. King for the favour he has done me in subscribing to my Homer, and at the same time begging you to make my best compliments to him; I conclude myself, with Mrs. Unwin's acknowledgements of your most acceptable present to her, your obliged and affectionate,

W. C.

CCXLI

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON, Jan. 29, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I shall be a better, at least a more frequent correspondent, when I have done with Homer. I am not forgetful of any letters that I owe, and least of

all forgetful of my debts in that way to you ; on the contrary, I live in a continual state of self-reproach for not writing more punctually ; but the old Grecian, whom I charge myself never to neglect, lest I should never finish him, has at present a voice that seems to drown all other demands, and many to which I could listen with more pleasure than even to his *os rotundum*. I am now in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, conversing with the dead. Invoke the Muse in my behalf, that I may roll the stone of Sisyphus with some success. To do it as Homer has done it is, I suppose, in our verse and language, impossible ; but I will hope not to labour altogether to as little purpose as Sisyphus himself did.

Though I meddle little with politics, and can find but little leisure to do so, the present state of things unavoidably engages a share of my attention. But as they say, Archimedes, when Syracuse was taken, was found busied in the solution of a problem, so, come what may, I shall be found translating Homer.—

Sincerely yours,

W. C.

CCXLII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, Jan. 31, 1789.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

I have dined thrice at the Hall since we lost you, and this morning accompanied Mrs. Frog in her chaise

to Chicheley. What vagary I shall perform next is at present uncertain, but such violent doings must have proportionable consequences. Mrs. Unwin certainly recovers, but not fast enough to satisfy me. She now moves from chamber to chamber without help of wheels, but not without help of a staff on one side, and a human prop on the other. In another week I hope she will be able to descend the staircase, but it will probably be long ere she will move unsupported. Yesterday an old man came hither on foot from Kimbolton; he brought a basket addressed to me from my yet unseen friend Mrs. King; it contained two pair of bottle-stands, her own manufacture; a knitting bag, and a piece of plum-cake. The time seems approaching when that good lady and we are to be better acquainted; and all these *douceurs* announce it.

I have lately had a letter to write daily, and sometimes more than one: this is one reason why I have not sooner answered your last. You will not forget that you allowed me a latitude in that respect, and I begin already to give you proof how much I am persuaded of the sincerity with which you did it. In truth, I am the busiest man that ever lived sequestered as I do, and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity.

Mr. Chester, who if not a professed virtuoso, is yet a person of some skill in articles of virtù, produced for our amusement a small drawer furnished with seals and impressions of seals,—antiques. When he had displayed and we had admired all his treasures of this

kind, I took the ring from my finger, which you gave me, and offered it to his inspection, telling him by whom it was purchased, where, and at what price. He examined it with much attention, and begged me to let him take an impression from it. He did so, and expressed still more admiration. I put it again on my finger, and in a quarter of an hour he begged to take another. Having taken another, he returned it to me, saying that he had shown me an impression of a seal accounted the best in England, (if I mistake not, it was a Hercules, an antique in possession of the Duke of Northumberland,) but that he thought mine a better, and much undersold at thirty guineas. He took the impression with much address, and I never myself viewed it before to so great advantage.

It would be an easy matter to kill me, by putting me into a chaise and commanding me to talk as I go. It is astonishing how exhausted I feel myself after rumbling and chattering incessantly for three hours.

Mrs. Frog, of Bath, is better, and George continues at the Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Gifford are expected there next Tuesday. Bully is in perfect health, and if I can secure him from such a fate, shall never be cat's-meat. Take care of thyself for my sake, that I may see thee yet again in due season. It is very kind in Mr. Rose to distinguish so honourably a poor poet like me, and it shall be my endeavour to merit by my future good behaviour as a bard the favour which he shows me now. Your kind expression on the same subject I will never forget; but I had a thousand

times rather be as poor as all poets are, than you should ungown yourself to prevent it.

I sent my verses to the *World* at the wrong time. That paper is certainly veering, and has been veering for some weeks past : it was not likely therefore that the printer of it should do any thing less than suppress a squib sent hissing at the *Morning Herald*, the principal trumpet of the party he had just adopted. Farewell, my dearest coz. With Mrs. Unwin's affectionate respects, I am ever thine,

WM. C.

CCXLIII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, June 5, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am going to give you a deal of trouble, but London folks must be content to be troubled by country folks ; for in London only can our strange necessities be supplied. You must buy for me, if you please, a cuckoo clock ; and now I will tell you where they are sold, which, Londoner as you are, it is possible you may not know. They are sold, I am informed, at more houses than one, in that narrow part of Holborn which leads into broad St. Giles's. It seems they are well-going clocks, and cheap, which are the two best recommendations of any clock. They are made in Germany, and such numbers of them are annually imported, that they are become even a considerable article of commerce.

I return you many thanks for Boswell's *Tour*. I read it to Mrs. Unwin after supper, and we find it amusing. There is much trash in it, as there must always be in every narrative that relates indiscriminately all that passed. But now and then the Doctor speaks like an oracle, and that makes amends for all. Sir John was a coxcomb, and Boswell is not less a coxcomb, though of another kind. I fancy Johnson made coxcombs of all his friends, and they in return made him a coxcomb ; for, with reverence be it spoken, such he certainly was, and flattered as he was, he was sure to be so.

Thanks for your invitation to London,—but unless London can come to me, I fear we shall never meet. I was sure that you would love my friend, when you should once be well acquainted with him ; and equally sure that he would take kindly to you.

Now for Homer.

W. C.

CCXLIV

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, *June 20, 1789.*

AMICO MIO,

I am truly sorry that it must be so long before we can have an opportunity to meet. My cousin, in her last letter but one, inspired me with other expectations, expressing a purpose, if the matter could be so contrived, of bringing you with her ; I was willing to

believe that you had consulted together on the subject, and found it feasible. A month was formerly a trifle in my account ; but at my present age I give it all its importance, and grudge that so many months should yet pass, in which I have not even a glimpse of those I love, and of whom, the course of nature considered, I must ere long take leave for ever :—but I shall live till August.

Many thanks for the cuckoo, which arrived perfectly safe, and goes well, to the amusement and amazement of all who hear it. Hannah lies awake to hear it, and I am not sure that we have not others in the house that admire his music as much as she.

Having read both Hawkins and Boswell, I now think myself almost as much a master of Johnson's character, as if I had known him personally, and cannot but regret that *our bards of other times* found no such biographers as these. They have both been ridiculed, and the wits have had their laugh ; but such a history of Milton or Shakespeare, as they have given of Johnson—O how desirable !

CCXLV

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, June 23, 1789.

One more scrap of a letter, my dearest coz, and then I hope it will be long before I shall have occasion to epistolize thee again. I rejoice that the day is at last

fixed for your coming, and woe be to any, whether male or female, who shall now interpose to hinder it ! We have had much foul weather, and the weather is still foul. This is *tant mieux*. It will be fair when you arrive, and the country the pleasanter for the deluge that has been poured down upon it. My laurels already give proof of the benefit they have received. A few days ago they were in appearance lifeless, but they are now almost covered with young leaves, save and except those under your parlour-window, which, I am sorry to say, are still but melancholy figures. Why they should have fared worse than the rest I am at a loss to imagine, for they certainly have been more sheltered, and have a better aspect.

Mr. Frog has just passed by on his return to London. I dined with him yesterday. Mrs. Unwin being no longer able to walk in pattens or clogs, was prevented by the dirt. The Catholic application to Parliament, I find, is not likely to speed at present. The Bishop of London is not favourable to it ; he leads all the other Bishops, and the Bishops all together lead Mr. Pitt. The Chancellor, on the other hand, is much their friend. But whether Chancellor alone will be able hereafter to preponderate against such a weight of episcopacy seems doubtful.

I learn from the Frogs that I am somewhat formidable to Mrs. B. Chester, and that she trembles at the thought of encountering a man of my extraordinary consequence. I am glad of this. Nothing could so effectually relieve me from the fears that I should

otherwise have of her. Let her not detain you longer than the appointed Tuesday, and I will promise to frighten her as little as possible.

Thanks for the pains thou hast taken to promulgate my *Illumination* verses, especially that thou didst take so sure a way to mortify the printer of the *World*. I dare say the rogue is now ready to hang himself. It would be a pleasant thing to see him the subject of an article in his own paper.—“The cause of this rash action, we understand, was the concern he felt at having neglected to print those incomparable stanzas by the author of *The Task*, which appeared lately in *The Times*.”—Thus would complete justice be done to my violated importance, and an example held up in the eyes of all such vermin to deter them from taking such liberty with me in future.

Adieu, my dear. The bells are effectually muffled, and you have no salute to fear from the steeple. Lady Spencer is doubtless a respectable patroness, and I can have no objection to her, should you persist in declining yourself the honour that I designed you. But to tell you the truth, I had rather have seen your name prefixed to my labours than even hers or any body's.

We truly rejoice in the King's complete restoration, a restoration as worthy to be remembered as any that has ever been commemorated in this country. The jaunt he proposes will probably be of great use to him, and, to the mortification of some enemies that he has in his own household, prove the means of lengthening his reign and our prosperity.

God give thee a good journey,—so prays Mrs. Unwin, and so, my dear cousin, ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCXLVI

To Mrs. Throckmorton.

July 18, 1789.

Many thanks, my dear madam, for your extract from George's letter. I retain but little Italian, yet that little was so forcibly mustered by the consciousness that I was myself the subject, that I presently became master of it. I have always said that George is a poet, and I am never in his company but I discover proofs of it ; and the delicate address by which he has managed his complimentary mention of me, convinces me of it still more than ever. Here are a thousand poets of us, who have impudence enough to write for the public ; but amongst the modest men who are by diffidence restrained from such an enterprise are those who would eclipse us all. I wish that George would make the experiment. I would bind on his laurels with my own hand.

Your gardener has gone after his wife, but having neglected to take his lyre, *alias* fiddle, with him, has not yet brought home his Eurydice. Your clock in the hall has stopped, and (strange to tell !) it stopped at sight of the watch-maker ; for he only looked at it, and it has been motionless ever since. Mr. Greg-

son is gone, and the Hall is a desolation. Pray don't think any place pleasant that you may find in your rambles, that we may see you the sooner. Your aviary is all in good health. I pass it every day, and often enquire at the lattice ; the inhabitants of it send their duty, and wish for your return. I took notice of the inscription on your seal, and had we an artist here capable of furnishing me with another, you should read on mine, "*Encore une lettre.*"—Adieu,

W. C.

CCXLVII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, July 23, 1789.

You do well, my dear sir, to improve your opportunity ; to speak in the rural phrase, this is your sowing time, and the sheaves you look for can never be yours unless you make that use of it. The colour of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years in which we are our own masters, make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments. Had I employed my time as wisely as you, in a situation very similar to yours, I had never been a poet perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society ; and a situation in which my friends would have been better pleased to see me. But three years misspent in an attorney's office were almost of

course followed by several more equally misspent in the Temple, and the consequence has been, as the Italian epitaph says, "*Sto qui.*"—The only use I can make of myself now, at least the best, is to serve *in terrorem* to others, when occasion may happen to offer, that they may escape (so far as my admonitions can have any weight with them,) my folly and my fate. When you feel yourself tempted to relax a little of the strictness of your present discipline, and indulge in amusement incompatible with your future interests, think on your friend at Weston.

Having said this, I shall next, with my whole heart, invite you hither, and assure you that I look forward to approaching August with great pleasure, because it promises me your company. After a little time, (which we shall wish longer,) spent with us, you will return invigorated to your studies, and pursue them with the more advantage. In the mean time you have lost little, in point of season, by being confined to London. Incessant rains and meadows under water, have given to the summer the air of winter, and the country has been deprived of half its beauties.

It is time to tell you that we are well, and often make you our subject. This is the third meeting that my cousin and we have had in this country; and a great instance of good fortune I account it in such a world as this, to have expected such a pleasure thrice without being once disappointed. Add to this wonder as soon as you can by making yourself of the party.

W. C.

CCXLVIII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, *Aug. 8, 1789.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Come when you will, or when you can, you cannot come at a wrong time, but we shall expect you on the day mentioned.

If you have any book that you think will make pleasant evening reading, bring it with you. I now read Mrs. Piozzi's *Travels* to the ladies after supper, and shall probably have finished them before we shall have the pleasure of seeing you. It is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we who make books ourselves are more merciful to book-makers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write ; there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the *Dunciad* should have written these lines :

The mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me.

Alas ! for Pope, if the mercy he showed to others was the measure of the mercy he received ! he was the less pardonable too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition.

I scratch this between dinner and tea ; a time when I cannot write much without disordering my noddle, and bringing a flush into my face. You will excuse

me therefore if, through respect for the two important considerations of health and beauty, I conclude myself, ever yours,

W. C.

CCXLIX

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

August 12, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I rejoice that you and Mrs. Hill are so agreeably occupied in your retreat. August, I hope, will make us amends for the gloom of its many wintry predecessors. We are now gathering from our meadows, not hay, but muck; such stuff as deserves not the carriage, which yet it must have, that the after-crop may have leave to grow. The Ouse has hardly deigned to run in his channel since the summer began.

My muse were a vixen, if she were not always ready to fly in obedience to your commands. But what can be done? I can write nothing in the few hours that remain to me of this day, that will be fit for your purpose; and, unless I could dispatch what I write by to-morrow's post, it would not reach you in time. I must add, too, that my friend the vicar of the next parish engaged me, the day before yesterday, to furnish him by next Sunday with a hymn, to be sung on the occasion of his preaching to the children of the Sunday-school: of which hymn

I have not yet produced a syllable. I am somewhat in the case of lawyer Dowling, in *Tom Jones*; and could I split myself into as many poets as there are Muses, could find employment for them all.—Adieu, my dear friend, I am ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCL

To the Rev. John Newton.

Aug. 16, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Mrs. Newton and you are both kind and just in believing that I do not love you less when I am long silent. Perhaps a friend of mine, who wishes me to have him always in my thoughts, is never so effectually possessed of the accomplishment of that wish, as when I have been long his debtor; for *then* I think of him not only every day, but day and night, and all day long. But I confess at the same time, that my thoughts of you will be more pleasant to myself when I shall have exonerated my conscience by giving you the letter so long your due. Therefore, here it comes;—little worth your having; but payment such as it is, that you have a right to expect, and that is essential to my own tranquillity.

That the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* should have proved the occasion of my suspending my correspondence with you, is a proof how little we foresee the consequences of what we publish. Homer, I dare say, hardly at all

suspected that at the fag-end of time two personages would appear, the one ycleped Sir Newton, and the other Sir Cowper, who loving each other heartily, would nevertheless suffer the pains of an interrupted intercourse, his poems the cause. So, however, it has happened ; and though it would not, I suppose, extort from the old bard a single sigh, if he knew it, yet to me it suggests the serious reflection above mentioned. An author by profession had need narrowly to watch his pen, lest a line should escape it which by possibility may do mischief, when he has been long dead and buried. What we have done, when we have written a book, will never be known till the day of judgement : then the account will be liquidated, and all the good that it has occasioned, and all the evil, will witness either for or against us.

I am now in the last book of the *Odyssey*, yet have still, I suppose, half a year's work before me. The accurate revisal of two such voluminous poems can hardly cost me less. I rejoice, however, that the goal is in prospect ; for though it has cost me years to run his race, it is only now that I begin to have a glimpse of it. That I shall never receive any proportionable pecuniary recompense for my long labours, is pretty certain ; and as to any fame that I may possibly gain by it, *that* is a commodity that daily sinks in value, in measure as the consummation of all things approaches. In the day when the lion shall dandle the kid, and a little child shall lead them, the world will have lost all relish for the fabulous legends of antiquity, and

Homer and his translator may budge off the stage together.

The ladies are coming down, and breakfast is at hand. Should I throw aside my letter unfinished, it is not probable that I shall be able to send it by this opportunity. Therefore that you may not wait longer for that for which you have waited too long already, I will only add that I always love and value you both as much as you can possibly wish, and that I am, with Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances, my dear friend, ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

You know that Lady Hesketh is with us ; you have had her compliments before, and I send them now, because she would bid me, if she knew that I write to you. We have a snug summer. Our neighbours are out on a ramble, and we have all their pleasant places to ourselves. Not that their return in September will interrupt our pleasures, for they are kind and agreeable, but it will give them a different cast.

Pray remember me to Mr. Bacon.

CCLI

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, Oct. 4, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The hamper is come, and come safe ; and the contents I can affirm on my own knowledge are excellent.

It chanced that another hamper and a box came by the same conveyance, all which I unpacked and expounded in the hall ; my cousin sitting, mean time, on the stairs, spectatress of the business. We diverted ourselves with imagining the manner in which Homer would have described the scene. Detailed in his circumstantial way, it would have furnished materials for a paragraph of considerable length in an *Odyssey*.

The straw-stuff'd hamper with his ruthless steel
 He open'd, cutting sheer th' inserted cords,
 Which bound the lid and lip secure. Forth came
 The rustling package first, bright straw of wheat,
 Or oats, or barley ; next a bottle green
 Throat-full, clear spirits the contents, distill'd
 Drop after drop odorous, by the art
 Of the fair mother of his friend—the Rose.

And so on.

I should rejoice to be the hero of such a tale in the hands of Homer.

You will remember, I trust, that when the state of your health or spirits calls for rural walks and fresh air, you have always a retreat at Weston.

We are all well, all love you, down to the very dog ; and shall be glad to hear that you have exchanged languor for alacrity, and the debility that you mention, for indefatigable vigour.

Mr. Throckmorton has made me a handsome present ; Villoison's edition of the *Iliad*, elegantly bound by Edwards. If I live long enough, by the contributions of my friends I shall once more be possessed of a library.—Adieu,

W. C.

CCLII

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

MY DEAR WALTER,

I know that you are too reasonable a man to expect any thing like punctuality of correspondence from a translator of Homer, especially from one who is a doer also of many other things at the same time ; for I labour hard not only to acquire a little fame for myself, but to win it also for others, men of whom I know nothing, not even their names, who send me their poetry, that by translating it out of prose into verse, I may make it more like poetry than it was. Having heard all this, you will feel yourself not only inclined to pardon my long silence, but to pity me also for the cause of it. You may if you please believe likewise, for it is true, that I have a faculty of remembering my friends even when I do not write to them, and of loving them not one jot the less, though I leave them to starve for want of a letter from me. And now I think you have an apology both as to style, matter, and manner, altogether unexceptionable.

Why is the winter like a backbiter ? Because Solomon says that a backbiter separates between chief friends, and so does the winter ; to this dirty season it is owing, that I see nothing of the valuable Chesters, whom indeed I see less at all times than serves at all to content me. I hear of them indeed occasionally from my neighbours at the Hall, but even of that com-

fort I have lately enjoyed less than usual, Mr. Throckmorton having been hindered by his first fit of the gout from his usual visits to Chicheley. The gout however has not prevented his making me a handsome present of a folio edition of the *Iliad*, published about a year since at Venice, by a literato, who calls himself Villoison. It is possible that you have seen it, and that if you have it not yourself, it has at least found its way to Lord Bagot's library. If neither should be the case, when I write next, (for sooner or later I shall certainly write to you again if I live,) will send you some pretty stories out of his *Prolegomena*, which will make your hair stand on end, as mine has stood on end already, they so horribly affect, in point of authenticity, the credit of the works of the immortal Homer.

Wishing you and Mrs. Bagot all the happiness that a new year can possibly bring with it, I remain with Mrs. Unwin's best respects, yours, my dear friend, with all sincerity,

W. C.

My paper mourns for the death of Lord Cowper, my valuable cousin, and much my benefactor.

CCLIII

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am a terrible creature for not writing sooner, but

the old excuse must serve, at least I will not occupy paper with the addition of others unless you should insist on it, in which case I can assure you that I have them ready. Now to business.

From Villoison I learn that it was the avowed opinion and persuasion of Callimachus, (whose hymns we both studied at Westminster,) that Homer was very imperfectly understood even in his day : that his admirers, deceived by the perspicuity of his style, fancied themselves masters of his meaning, when in truth they knew little about it.

Now we know that Callimachus, as I have hinted, was himself a poet, and a good one ; he was also esteemed a good critic : he almost, if not actually, adored Homer, and imitated him as nearly as he could.

What shall we say to this? I will tell you what I say to it. Callimachus meant, and he could mean nothing more by this assertion, than that the poems of Homer were in fact an allegory ; that under the obvious import of his stories lay concealed a mystic sense, sometimes philosophical, sometimes religious, sometimes moral, — and that the generality either wanted penetration or industry, or had not been properly qualified by their studies, to discover it. This I can readily believe, for I am myself an ignoramus in these points, and except here and there, discern nothing more than the letter. But if Callimachus will tell me that even of *that* I am ignorant, I hope soon by two great volumes to convince him of the contrary.

I learn also from the same Villoison, that Pistratus, who was a sort of Mæcenas in Athens, where he gave great encouragement to literature, and built and furnished a public library, regretting that there was no complete copy of Homer's works in the world, resolved to make one. For this purpose he advertised rewards in all the newspapers to those, who, being possessed *memoriter* of any part or parcels of the poems of that bard, would resort to his house, and repeat them to his secretaries, that they might write them. Now it happened that more were desirous of the reward than qualified to deserve it. The consequence was that the nonqualified persons having, many of them, a pretty knack at versification, imposed on the generous Athenian most egregiously, giving him instead of Homer's verses, which they had not to give, verses of their own invention. He, good creature, suspecting no such fraud, took them all for gospel, and entered them into his volume accordingly.

Now let *him* believe the story who can. That Homer's works were in this manner corrected, I *can* believe ; but that a learned Athenian could be so imposed upon, with sufficient means of detection at hand, I *cannot*. Would he not be on his guard ? Would not a difference of style and manner have occurred ? Would not that difference have excited a suspicion ? Would not that suspicion have led to enquiry ? and would not that enquiry have issued in detection ? For how easy was it in the multitude of Homer-conners to find two, ten, twenty, possessed of the questionable

passage, and by confronting them with the impudent impostor, to convict him. *Abeas ergo in malam rem cum istis tuis hallucinationibus, Villoisone!*—Faithfully yours,

W. C.

CCLIV

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, Jan. 3, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have been long silent, but you have had the charity, I hope and believe, not to ascribe my silence to a wrong cause. The truth is I have been too busy to write to any body, having been obliged to give my early mornings to the revisal and correction of a little volume of Hymns for Children, written by I know not whom. This task I finished but yesterday, and while it was in hand wrote only to my cousin, and to her rarely. From her, however, I knew that you would hear of my well being, which made me less anxious about my debts to you, than I could have been otherwise.

I am almost the only person at Weston, known to you, who have enjoyed tolerable health this winter. In your next letter give us some account of your own state of health, for I have had many anxieties about you. The winter has been mild; but our winters are in general such that when a friend leaves us in the

beginning of that season, I always feel in my heart a *perhaps* importing that we have possibly met for the last time, and that the robins may whistle on the grave of one of us before the return of summer.

I am still thrumming Homer's lyre ; that is to say, I am still employed in my last revisal ; and to give you some idea of the intenseness of my toils, I will inform you that it cost me all the morning yesterday, and all the evening, to translate a single simile to my mind. The transitions from one member of the subject to another, though easy and natural in the Greek, turn out often so intolerably awkward in an English version, that almost endless labour, and no little address, are requisite to give them grace and elegance. I forget if I told you that your German Clavis has been of considerable use to me. I am indebted to it for a right understanding of the manner in which Achilles prepared pork, mutton, and goat's flesh, for the entertainment of his friends, in the night when they came deputed by Agamemnon to negotiate a reconciliation : a passage of which nobody in the world is perfectly master, myself only and Schaulfelbergerus excepted, nor ever was, except when Greek was a *live* language.

I do not know whether my cousin has told you or not how I brag in my letters to her concerning my Translation ; perhaps her modesty feels more for me than mine for myself, and she would blush to let even you know the degree of my self-conceit on that subject. I will tell you, however, expressing myself as decently as vanity will permit, that it has undergone

such a change for the better in this last revisal, that I have much warmer hopes of success than formerly.

—Yours,

W. C.

CCLV

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, *Feb. 2, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Should Heyne's Homer appear before mine, which I hope is not probable, and should he adopt in it the opinion of Bentley, that the whole last *Odyssey* is spurious, I will dare to contradict both him and the Doctor. I am only in part of Bentley's mind, (if indeed his mind were such,) in this matter; and giant as he was in learning, and eagle-eyed in criticism, am persuaded, convinced, and sure, (can I be more positive?) that except from the moment when the Ithacans begin to meditate an attack on the cottage of Laertes, and thence to the end, that book is the work of Homer. From the moment aforesaid, I yield the point, or rather have never, since I had any skill in Homer, felt myself at all inclined to dispute it. But I believe perfectly at the same time that, Homer himself alone excepted, the Greek poet never existed who could have written the speeches made by the shade of Agamemnon, in which there is more insight into the human heart discovered than I ever saw in any other work, unless in Shakespeare's. I am equally disposed to fight for the

whole passage that describes Laertes, and the interview between him and Ulysses. Let Bentley grant these to Homer, and I will shake hands with him as to all the rest. The battle with which the book concludes is, I think, a paltry battle, and there is a huddle in the management of it altogether unworthy of my favourite, and the favourite of all ages.

If you should happen to fall into company with Dr. Warton again, you will not, I dare say, forget to make him my respectful compliments, and to assure him that I felt myself not a little flattered by the favourable mention he was pleased to make of me and my labours. The poet who pleases a man like him has nothing left to wish for. I am glad that you were pleased with my young cousin Johnson¹; he is a boy, and bashful, but has great merit in respect both of character and intellect. So far, at least, as in a week's knowledge of him I could possibly learn; he is very amiable, and very sensible, and inspired me with a warm wish to know him better.

W. C.

CCLVI

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *Feb.* 26, 1790.

You have set my heart at ease, my cousin, so far as you were yourself the object of its anxieties. What

¹ Afterwards the Rev. John Johnson, with whom Cowper spent the last years of his life in Norfolk.

other troubles it feels can be cured by God^{as} alone. But you are never silent a week longer than usual, without giving an opportunity to my imagination, (ever fruitful in flowers of a sable hue,) to tease me with them day and night. London is indeed a pestilent place, as you call it, and I would, with all my heart, that thou hadst less to do with it; were you under the same roof with me, I should know you to be safe, and should never distress you with melancholy letters.

I feel myself well enough inclined to the measure you propose, and will show to your new acquaintance with all my heart a sample of my translation, but it shall not, if you please, be taken from the *Odyssey*. It is a poem of a gentler character than the *Iliad*, and as I propose to carry her by a *coup de main*, I shall employ Achilles, Agamemnon, and the two armies of Greece and Troy in my service. I will accordingly send you in the box that I received from you last night the two first books of the *Iliad*, for that lady's perusal; to those I have given a third revisal; for them therefore I will be answerable, and am not afraid to stake the credit of my work upon *them* with her, or with any living wight, especially one who understands the original. I do not mean that even they are finished, for I shall examine and cross-examine them yet again, and so you may tell her, but I know that they will not disgrace me; whereas it is so long since I have looked at the *Odyssey*, that I know nothing at all about it. They shall set sail from Olney on Monday morning in the Diligence, and will reach you I hope in the

evening. As soon as she has done with them, I shall be glad to have them again, for the time draws near when I shall want to give them the last touch.

I am delighted with Mrs. Bodham's kindness, in giving me the only picture of my own mother that is to be found, I suppose, in all the world. I had rather possess it than the richest jewel in the British crown, for I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated. I remember her too, young as I was when she died, well enough to know that it is a very exact resemblance of her, and as such it is to me invaluable. Every body loved her, and with an amiable character so impressed upon all her features, every body was sure to do so.

I have a very affectionate and a very clever letter from Johnson, who promises me the transcript of the books entrusted to him in a few days. I have a great love for that young man ; he has some drops of the same stream in his veins that once animated the original of that dear picture.

W. C.

CCLVII

To Mrs. Bodham.

WESTON, *Feb.* 27, 1790.

MY DEAREST ROSE,

Whom I thought withered, and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive : nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it

from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her : I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake, and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year ; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe more of the Donne than of the Cowper ; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother ; and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability ; and a little, I would hope, both of

his and of her——, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's,¹ and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew,² to my knowledge; and that breaking through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together, for want of house-room; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished.

¹ John Donne (1573-1631), whose life was written by Izaak Walton.

² John Johnson.

Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me ; she was my playfellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so ! Neither do I at all forget my Cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am, my dear, dear Rose, ever yours,

W. C.

P. S.—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P. S.—I find on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only room for you, and Mr. Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you ; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

CCLVIII

*To Mrs. King.*WESTON UNDERWOOD,
March 12, 1790.

MY DEAR MADAM,

I live in such a nook, have so few opportunities of hearing news, and so little time to read it, that to me, to begin a letter seems always a sort of forlorn hope. Can it be possible, I say to myself, that I should have anything to communicate? These misgivings have an ill effect, so far as my punctuality is concerned, and are apt to deter me from the business of letter-writing, as from an enterprise altogether impracticable.

I will not say that you are more pleased with my rifles than they deserve, lest I should seem to call your judgement in question; but I suspect that a little partiality to the brother of my brother, enters into the opinion you form of them. No matter, however, by what you are influenced, it is for my interest that you should like them at any rate, because, such as they are, they are the only return I can make you for all your kindness. This consideration will have two effects; it will have a tendency to make me more industrious in the production of such pieces, and more attentive to the manner in which I write them. This reminds me of a piece in your possession, which I will entreat you to commit to the flames, because I am somewhat ashamed of it. To make you amends, I hereby promise to send you a new edition of it when

time shall serve, delivered from the passages that I dislike in the first, and in other respects amended. The piece that I mean, is one entitled—"To Lady Hesketh on her furnishing for me our house at Weston"—or, as the lawyers say, words to that amount. I have, likewise, since I sent you the last packet, been delivered of two or three other brats, and, as the year proceeds, shall probably add to the number. All that come shall be basketed in time, and conveyed to your door.

I have lately received from a female cousin of mine in Norfolk, whom I have not seen these thirty years, a picture of my own mother. She died when I wanted two days of being six years old ; yet I remember her perfectly, find the picture a strong likeness of her, and because her memory has been ever precious to me, have written a poem on the receipt of it : a poem which, one excepted, I had more pleasure in writing than any that I ever wrote. That one was addressed to a lady whom I expect in a few minutes to come down to breakfast, and who has supplied to me the place of my own mother—my own invaluable mother, these six-and-twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers, but a plurality of mothers is not common.

Adieu, my dear Madam ; be assured that I always think of you with much esteem and affection, and am, with mine and Mrs. Unwin's best compliments to you and yours, most unfeignedly your friend and humble servant,

W. C.

CCLIX

*To Lady Hesketh.*THE LODGE, *March 22, 1790.*

I rejoice, my dearest cousin, that my MSS. have roamed the earth so successfully, and have met with no disaster. The single book excepted that went to the bottom of the Thames and rose again, they have been fortunate without exception. I am not superstitious, but have nevertheless as good a right to believe that adventure an omen, and a favourable one, as Swift had to interpret, as he did, the loss of a fine fish, which he had no sooner laid on the bank, than it flounced into the water again. This he tells us himself he always considered as a type of his future disappointments: and why may not I as well consider the marvellous recovery of my lost book from the bottom of the Thames, as typical of its future prosperity? To say the truth, I have no fears now about the success of my Translation, though in time past I have had many. I knew there was a style somewhere, could I but find it, in which Homer ought to be rendered, and which alone would suit him. Long time I blundered about it, ere I could attain to any decided judgement on the matter; at first I was betrayed by a desire of accommodating my language to the simplicity of his, into much of the quaintness that belonged to our writers of the fifteenth century. In the course of many revisals I have delivered myself from this evil, I

believe, entirely ; but I have done it slowly, and as a man separates himself from his mistress when he is going to marry. I had so strong a predilection in favour of this style at first, that I was crazed to find that others were not as much enamoured with it as myself. At every passage of that sort which I obliterated, I groaned bitterly, and said to myself, I am spoiling my work to please those who have no taste for the simple graces of antiquity. But in measure, as I adopted a more modern phraseology, I became a convert to their opinion, and in the last revisal, which I am now making, am not sensible of having spared a single expression of the obsolete kind. I see my work so much improved by this alteration, that I am filled with wonder at my own backwardness to assent to the necessity of it, and the more when I consider that Milton, with whose manner I account myself intimately acquainted, is never quaint, never twangs through the nose, but is every where grand and elegant, without resorting to musty antiquity for his beauties. On the contrary, he took a long stride forward, left the language of his own day far behind him, and anticipated the expressions of a century yet to come.

I have now, as I said, no longer any doubt of the event, but I will give thee a shilling if thou wilt tell me what I shall say in my Preface. It is an affair of much delicacy, and I have as many opinions about it as there are whims in a weathercock.

Send my MSS. and thine when thou wilt. In a day or two I shall enter on the last *Iliad*. When I have

finished it I shall give the *Odyssey* one more reading, and shall therefore shortly have occasion for the copy in thy possession; but you see that there is no need to hurry.

I leave the little space for Mrs. Unwin's use, who means, I believe, to occupy it, and am evermore
thine most truly,

W. C.

Postscript in the hand of Mrs. Unwin.

You cannot imagine how much your ladyship would oblige your unworthy servant, if you would be so good to let me know in what point I differ from you. All that at present I can say is, that I will readily sacrifice my own opinion, unless I can give you a substantial reason for adhering to it.

CCLX

To John Johnson, Esq.

WESTON, March 23, 1790.

Your MSS. arrived safe in New Norfolk Street, and I am much obliged to you for your labours. Were you now at Weston I could furnish you with employment for some weeks, and shall perhaps be equally able to do it in summer, for I have lost my best amanuensis in this place, Mr. George Throckmorton, who is gone to Bath.

You are a man to be envied, who have never read

the *Odyssey*, which is one of the most amusing story-books in the world. There is also much of the finest poetry in the world to be found in it, notwithstanding all that Longinus has insinuated to the contrary. His comparison of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the meridian, and to the declining sun, is pretty, but I am persuaded, not just. The prettiness of it seduced him; he was otherwise too judicious a reader of Homer to have made it. I can find in the latter no symptoms of impaired ability, none of the effects of age; on the contrary, it seems to me a certainty, that Homer, had he written the *Odyssey* in his youth, could not have written it better: and if the *Iliad* in his old age, that he would have written it just as well. A critic would tell me, that instead of *written*, I should have said *composed*. Very likely;—but I am not writing to one of that snarling generation.

My boy, I long to see thee again. It has happened some way or other, that Mrs. Unwin and I have conceived a great affection for thee. That I should, is the less to be wondered at, (because thou art a shred of my own mother;) neither is the wonder great that she should fall into the same predicament: for she loves every thing that I love. You will observe, that your own personal right to be beloved makes no part of the consideration. There is nothing that I touch with so much tenderness as the vanity of a young man, because I know how extremely susceptible he is of impressions that might hurt him in that particular part of his composition. If you should ever prove a

coxcomb, from which character you stand just now at a greater distance than any young man I know, it shall never be said that I have made you one ; no, you will gain nothing by me but the honour of being much valued by a poor poet, who can do you no good while he lives, and has nothing to leave you when he dies. If you can be contented to be dear to me on these conditions, so you shall ; but other terms more advantageous than these, or more inviting, none have I to propose.

Farewell. Puzzle not yourself about a subject when you write to either of us ; every thing is subject enough from those we love.

W. C.

CCLXI

To Lady Hesketh.

WESTON, *April 30, 1790.*

To my old friend, Dr. Madan, thou couldst not have spoken better than thou didst. Tell him, I beseech you, that I have not forgotten him : tell him also that to my heart and home he will be always welcome ; nor he only, but all that are his. His judgement of my Translation gave me the highest satisfaction, because I know him to be a rare old Grecian.

The General's approbation of my picture verses gave me also much pleasure. I wrote them not without tears, therefore I presume it may be that they are felt by others. Should he offer me my father's picture, I

shall gladly accept it. A melancholy pleasure is better than none,—nay verily, better than most. He had a sad task imposed on him, but no man could acquit himself of such a one with more discretion, or with more tenderness. The death of the unfortunate young man reminded me of those lines in *Lycidas*,

It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the' eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine !——

How beautiful !

W. C.

CCLXII

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

May 2, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am still at the old sport—Homer all the morning, and Homer all the evening. Thus have I been held in constant employment, I know not exactly how many, but I believe these six years, an interval of eight months excepted. It is now become so familiar to me to take Homer from my shelf at a certain hour, that I shall, no doubt, continue to take him from my shelf at the same time, even after I have ceased to want him. That period is not far distant. I am now giving the last touches to a work which, had I foreseen the difficulty of it, I should never have meddled with ; but which, having at length nearly finished it to my mind, I shall discontinue with regret.

My very best compliments attend Mrs. Hill, whom I love, unsight unseen, as they say; but yet truly.
—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXIII

To Mrs. Throckmorton.

THE LODGE, *May 10, 1790.*

MY DEAR MRS. FROG,

You have by this time, I presume, heard from the Doctor, whom I desired to present to you our best affections, and to tell you that we are well. He sent an urchin, (I do not mean a hedge-hog, commonly called an urchin in old times, but a boy, commonly so called at present,) expecting that he would find you at Bucklands, whither he supposed you gone on Thursday. He sent him charged with divers articles, and among others with letters, or at least with a letter; which I mention, that if the boy should be lost, together with his dispatches, past all possibility of recovery, you may yet know that the Doctor stands acquitted of not writing. That he is utterly lost, (that is to say, the boy, for the Doctor being the last antecedent, as the grammarians say, you might otherwise suppose that he was intended,) is the more probable, because he was never four miles from his home before, having only travelled at the side of a plough-team; and when the Doctor gave him his

direction to Bucklands, he asked, very naturally, if that place was in England. So what has become of him Heaven knows !

I do not know that any adventures have presented themselves since your departure worth mentioning, except that the rabbit, that infested your wilderness, has been shot for devouring your carnations ; and that I myself have been in some danger of being devoured in like manner by a great dog, viz. Pearson's. But I wrote him a letter on Friday, (I mean a letter to Pearson, not to his dog, which I mention to prevent mistakes—for the said last antecedent might occasion them in this place also,) informing him, that unless he tied up his great mastiff in the day-time, I would send him a worse thing, commonly called and known by the name of an attorney. When I go forth to ramble in the fields, I do not sally like Don Quixote, with a purpose of encountering monsters, if any such can be found ; but am a peaceable poor gentleman, and a poet, who mean nobody any harm,—the foxhunters and the two universities of this land excepted.

I cannot learn from any creature whether the Turnpike Bill is alive or dead ;—so ignorant am I, and by such ignoramus surrounded. But if I know little else, this at least I know, that I love you, and Mr. Frog ; that I long for your return, and that I am, with Mrs. Unwin's best affections, ever yours,

W. C.

CCLXIV

*To Lady Hesketh.*THE LODGE, *May 28, 1790.*

MY DEAREST COZ,

I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention,¹ whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, wouldst least wish me to wear it. Adieu, ever thine,—in Homer-hurry,

W. C.

CCLXV

*To Mrs. King.*WESTON, *June 14, 1790.*

MY DEAR MADAM,

I have hardly a scrap of paper belonging to me that is not scribbled over with blank verse; and taking out your letter from a bundle of others, this moment, I find it thus inscribed on the seal side:

————— meantime his steeds
 Snorted, by Myrmidons detain'd, and loosed
 From their own master's chariot, foam'd to fly.

¹ The wreath of Poet-laureate rendered vacant by the death of Thomas Warton.

You will easily guess to what they belong; and I mention the circumstance merely in proof of my perpetual engagement to Homer, whether at home or abroad; for when I committed these lines to the back of your letter, I was rambling at a considerable distance from home. I set one foot on a mole-hill, placed my hat with the crown upward on my knee, laid your letter upon it, and with a pencil wrote the fragment that I have sent you. In the same posture I have written many and many a passage of a work which I hope soon to have done with. But all this is foreign to what I intended when I first took pen in hand. My purpose then was, to excuse my long silence as well as I could, by telling you that I am at present not only a labourer in verse, but in prose also, having been requested by a friend, to whom I could not refuse it, to translate for him a series of Latin letters received from a Dutch minister of the gospel at the Cape of Good Hope. With this additional occupation you will be sensible that my hands are full; and it is a truth that, except to yourself, I would, just at this time, have written to nobody.

I felt a true concern for what you told me in your last respecting the ill state of health of your much-valued friend Mr. Martyn. You say, if I knew half his worth, I should, with you, wish his longer continuance below. Now you must understand that, ignorant as I am of Mr. Martyn, except by your report of him, I do nevertheless sincerely wish it—and that, both for your sake and my own; nor less

for the sake of the public. For your sake, because you love and esteem him highly ; for the sake of the public, because, should it please God to take him before he has completed his great botanical work, I suppose no other person will be able to finish it so well ; and for my own sake, because I know he has a kind and favourable opinion beforehand of my translation, and consequently, should it justify his prejudice when it appears, he will stand my friend against an army of Cambridge critics. It would have been strange indeed if *self* had not peeped out on this subject. I beg you will present my best respects to him, and assure him that were it possible he could visit Weston, I should be most happy to receive him.

Mrs. Unwin would have been employed in transcribing my rhymes for you, would her health have permitted ; but it is very seldom that she can write without being much a sufferer by it. She has almost a constant pain in her side, which forbids it. As soon as it leaves her, or much abates, she will be glad to work for you.

I am, like you and Mr. King, an admirer of clouds, but only when there are blue intervals, and pretty wide ones too between them. One cloud is too much for me, but a hundred are not too many. So with this riddle and with my best respects to Mr. King, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's to you both, I remain, my dear madam, truly yours,

W. C.

CCLXVI

*To Lady Hesketh.*THE LODGE, *June 17, 1790.*

MY DEAR COZ,

Here am I, at eight in the morning, in full dress, going a visiting to Chicheley. We are a strong party, and fill two chaises; Mrs. F. the elder, and Mrs. G. in one; Mrs. F. the younger, and myself in another. Were it not that I shall find Chesters at the end of my journey, I should be inconsolable. That expectation alone supports my spirits; and even with this prospect before me, when I saw this moment a poor old woman coming up the lane opposite my window, I could not help sighing, and saying to myself—"Poor, but happy old woman! thou art exempted by thy situation in life from riding in chaises, and making thyself fine in a morning, happier therefore in my account than I, who am under the cruel necessity of doing both. Neither dost thou write verses, neither hast thou ever heard of the name of Homer, whom I am miserable to abandon for a whole morning!" This, and more of the same sort, passed in my mind on seeing the old woman abovesaid.

The troublesome business, with which I filled my last letter, is (I hope) by this time concluded, and Mr. Archdeacon satisfied. I can, to be sure, but ill afford to pay fifty pounds for another man's negligence, but would be happy to pay a hundred rather than

be treated as if I were insolvent,—threatened with attorneys and bums. One would think that, living where I live, I might be exempted from trouble. But alas ! as the philosophers often affirm, there is no nook under heaven in which trouble cannot enter ; and perhaps had there never been one philosopher in the world, this is a truth that would not have been always altogether a secret.

I have made two inscriptions lately at the request of Thomas Gifford, Esq. who is sowing twenty acres with acorns on one side of his house, and twenty acres with ditto on the other. He erects two memorials of stone on the occasion, that when posterity shall be curious to know the age of the oaks, their curiosity may be gratified.

My works therefore will not all perish, or will not all perish soon, for he has ordered his lapidary to cut the characters very deep, and in stone extremely hard. It is not in vain then, that I have so long exercised the business of a poet. I shall at least reap the reward of my labours, and be immortal probably for many years.—Ever thine,

W. C.

CCLXVII

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON, *June 22, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Villoison makes no mention of the serpent, whose

skin, or bowels, or perhaps both, were honoured with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* inscribed upon them. But I have conversed with a living eyewitness of an African serpent long enough to have afforded skin and guts for the purpose. In Africa there are ants also, which frequently destroy these monsters. They are not much larger than ours, but they travel in a column of immense length, and eat through every thing that opposes them. Their bite is like a spark of fire. When these serpents have killed their prey, lion or tiger or any other large animal, before they swallow him, they take a considerable circuit round about the carcase, to see if the ants are coming, because when they have gorged their prey, they are unable to escape them. They are nevertheless sometimes surprised by them in their unwieldy state, and the ants make a passage through them. Now if you thought your own story of Homer, bound in snake skin, worthy of three notes of admiration, you cannot do less than add six to mine, confessing at the same time, that if I put you to the expense of a letter, I do not make you pay your money for nothing. But this account I had from a person of most unimpeached veracity.

I rejoice with you in the good Bishop's removal to St. Asaph, and especially because the Norfolk parsons much more resemble the ants above-mentioned than he the serpent. He is neither of vast size, nor unwieldy, nor voracious; neither, I dare say, does he sleep after dinner, according to the practice of the said serpent. But, harmless as he is, I am mistaken if his mutinous

clergy did not sometimes disturb his rest, and if he did not find their bite, though they could not actually eat through him, in a degree resembling fire. Good men like him, and peaceable, should have good and peaceable folks to deal with, and I heartily wish him such in his new diocese. But if he will keep the clergy to their business, he shall have trouble, let him go where he may ; and this is boldly spoken, considering that I speak it to one of that reverend body. But ye are like Jeremiah's basket of figs. Some of you could not be better, and some of you are stark naught. Ask the bishop himself, if this be not true !

W. C.

CCLXVIII

To Lady Hesketh

July 7, 1790.

Instead of beginning with the saffron-vested morning to which Homer invites me, on a morning that has no saffron vest to boast, I shall begin with you.

It is irksome to us both to wait so long as we must for you, but we are willing to hope that by a longer stay you will make us amends for all this tedious procrastination.

Mrs. Unwin has made known her whole case to Mr. Gregson, whose opinion of it has been very consolatory to me : he says indeed it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time

not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side, but patience is an anodyne of God's own preparation, and of that he gives her largely.

The French, who like all lively folks are extreme in every thing, are such in their zeal for freedom; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society: but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics; and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings as they have sometimes treated their idols. To these however they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a little English sobriety, and that they want extremely: I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it.

CCLXIX

*To Mrs. Bodham.*WESTON, *Sept. 9, 1790.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

I am truly sorry to be forced after all to resign the hope of seeing you and Mr. Bodham at Weston this year; the next may possibly be more propitious, and I heartily wish it may. Poor Catharine's unseasonable indisposition has also cost us a disappointment, which we much regret; and were it not that Johnny has made shift to reach us, we should think ourselves completely unfortunate. But him we have, and him we will hold as long as we can, so expect not very soon to see him in Norfolk. He is so harmless, cheerful, gentle, and good-tempered, and I am so entirely at my ease with him, that I cannot surrender him without a *needs must*, even to those who have a superior claim upon him. He left us yesterday morning, and whither do you think he is gone, and on what errand? Gone, as sure as you are alive, to London, and to convey my Homer to the bookseller's. But he will return the day after to-morrow, and I mean to part with him no more, till necessity shall force us asunder. Suspect me not, my cousin, of being such a monster as to have imposed this task myself on your kind nephew, or even to have thought of doing it. It happened that one day, as we chatted by the fireside, I expressed a wish that I could hear of some trusty body going to

London, to whose care I might consign my voluminous labours, the work of five years. For I purpose never to visit that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge, of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish, than offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it ; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that unreasonable as I thought it at first, to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone therefore with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity I think a freebooter would covet less.

W. C.

CCLXX

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.**Sept. 17, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I received last night a copy of my subscribers' names from Johnson, in which I see how much I have been indebted to yours and Mrs. Hill's solicitations. Accept my best thanks, so justly due to you both. It is an illustrious catalogue, in respect of rank and title ; but methinks I should have liked it as well had it been more numerous. The sum subscribed, however, will defray the expense of printing ; which is as much

as, in these unsubscribing days, I had any reason to promise myself. I devoutly second your droll wish, that the booksellers may contend about me. The more the better. Seven times seven, if they please ; and let them fight with the fury of Achilles,

Till every rubric-post be crimson'd o'er
With blood of booksellers, in battle slain,
For me, and not a periwig untorn.

—Most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXI

To the Rev. John Newton.

Oct. 26, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We should have been happy to have received from you a more favourable account of Mrs. Newton's health. Yours is indeed a post of observation, and of observation the most interesting. It is well that you are enabled to bear the stress and intenseness of it without prejudice to your own health, or impediment to your ministry.

The last time I wrote to Johnson,¹ I made known to him your wishes to have your preface printed, and affixed, as soon as an opportunity shall offer ; expressing at the same time, my own desires to have it done. Whether I shall have any answer to my

¹ The poet's publisher.

proposal, is a matter of much uncertainty ; for he is always either too idle or too busy, I know not which, to write to me. Should you happen to pass his way, perhaps it would not be amiss to speak to him on the subject ; for it is easier to carry a point by six words spoken, than by writing as many sheets about it. I have asked him hither, when my cousin Johnson shall leave us, which will be in about a fortnight ; and should he come, will enforce the measure myself.

A yellow shower of leaves is falling continually from all the trees in the country. A few moments only seem to have passed since they were buds ; and in few moments more, they will have disappeared. It is one advantage of a rural situation, that it affords many hints of the rapidity with which life flies, that do not occur in towns and cities. It is impossible for a man, conversant with such scenes as surround me, not to advert daily to the shortness of his existence here, admonished of it, as he must be, by ten thousand objects. There was a time when I could contemplate my present state, and consider myself as a thing of a day with pleasure ; when I numbered the seasons as they passed in swift rotation, as a schoolboy numbers the days that interpose between the next vacation, when he shall see his parents and enjoy his home again. But to make so just an estimate of a life like this, is no longer in my power. The consideration of my short continuance here, which was once grateful to me, now fills me with

regret. I would live and live always, and am become such another wretch as Mæcenas was, who wished for long life, he cared not at what expense of sufferings. The only consolation left me on this subject is, that the voice of the Almighty can in one moment cure me of this mental infirmity. That He can, I know by experience; and there are reasons for which I ought to believe that He will. But from hope to despair is a transition that I have made so often, that I can only consider the hope that may come, and that sometimes I believe will, as a short prelude of joy to a miserable conclusion of sorrow that shall never end. Thus are my brightest prospects clouded, and thus to me is hope itself become like a withered flower, that has lost both its hue and its fragrance.

I ought not to have written in this dismal strain to you, in your present trying situation, nor did I intend it. You have more need to be cheered than to be saddened; but a dearth of other themes constrained me to choose myself for a subject, and of myself I can write no otherwise.

Adieu, my dear friend. We are well; and, notwithstanding all that I have said, I am myself as cheerful as usual. Lady Hesketh is here, and in her company even I, except now and then for a moment, forget my sorrows.—I remain, sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXII

To John Johnson, Esq.

WESTON, Jan. 21, 1791.

I know that you have already been catechized by Lady Hesketh on the subject of your return hither before the winter shall be over, and shall therefore only say that, if you CAN COME, we shall be happy to receive you. Remember also that nothing can excuse the nonperformance of a promise, but absolute necessity! In the mean time my faith in your veracity is such, that I am persuaded you will suffer nothing less than necessity to prevent it. Were you not extremely pleasant to us, and just the sort of youth that suits us, we should neither of us have said half so much, or perhaps a word on the subject.

Yours, my dear Johnny, are vagaries that I shall never see practised by any other; and whether you slap your ankle, or reel as if you were fuddled, or dance in the path before me, all is characteristic of yourself, and therefore to me delightful. I have hinted to you indeed sometimes, that you should be cautious of indulging antic habits and singularities of all sorts, and young men in general have need enough of such admonition. But yours are a sort of fairy habits, such as might belong to Puck or Robin Goodfellow, and therefore, good as the advice is, I should be half sorry should you take it.

This allowance at least I give you:—continue to

take your walks, if walks they may be called, exactly in their present fashion, till you have taken orders. Then indeed, forasmuch as a skipping, curvetting, bounding divine might be a spectacle not altogether seemly, I shall consent to your adoption of a more grave demeanour.

W. C.

CCLXXIII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, *Feb.* 5, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

My letters to you are all either petitionary, or in the style of acknowledgments and thanks, and such nearly in an alternate order. In my last, I loaded you with commissions, for the due discharge of which I am now to say, and say truly, how much I feel myself obliged to you; neither can I stop there, but must thank you likewise for new honours from Scotland, which have left me nothing to wish for from that country; for my list is now I believe graced with the subscription of all its learned bodies. I regret only that some of them arrived too late to do honour to my present publication of names. But there are those among them, and from Scotland too, that may give a useful hint perhaps to our own universities. Your very handsome present of Pope's Homer has arrived safe, notwithstanding an accident

that befel him by the way. The Hall-servant brought the parcel from Olney, resting it on the pommel of the saddle, and his horse fell with him. Pope was in consequence rolled in the dirt, but being well coated got no damage. If augurs and soothsayers were not out of fashion, I should have consulted one or two of that order, in hope of learning from them that this fall was ominous. I have found a place for him in the parlour, where he makes a splendid appearance, and where he shall not long want a neighbour, one who, if less popular than himself, shall at least look as big as he. How has it happened that since Pope did certainly dedicate both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, no dedication is found in this first edition of them?

W. C.

CCLXXIV

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON UNDERWOOD,
Feb. 26, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is a maxim of much weight,
Worth conning o'er and o'er,
He who has Homer to translate
Had need do nothing more.

But notwithstanding the truth and importance of this apophthegm, to which I lay claim as the original author of it, it is not equally true that my application

to Homer, close as it is, has been the sole cause of my delay to answer you. No. In observing so long a silence I have been influenced much more by a vindictive purpose,—a purpose to punish you for your suspicion that I could possibly feel myself hurt or offended by any critical suggestion of yours, that seemed to reflect on the purity of my nonsense verses. Understand, if you please, for the future, that whether I disport myself in Greek or Latin, or in whatsoever other language, you are hereby, henceforth, and for ever, entitled and warranted to take any liberties with it, to which you shall feel yourself inclined, not excepting even the lines themselves which stand at the head of this letter.

You delight me when you call *blank* verse the English *heroic*; for I have always thought, and often said, that we have no other verse worthy to be so entitled. When you read my Preface you will be made acquainted with my sentiments on this subject pretty much at large; for which reason I will curb my zeal, and say the less about it at present. That Johnson, who wrote harmoniously in rhyme, should have had so defective an ear as never to have discovered any music at all in blank verse, till he heard a particular friend of his reading it, is a wonder never sufficiently to be wondered at. Yet this is true on his own acknowledgment, and amounts to a plain confession, (of which perhaps he was not aware when he made it,) that he did not know how to read blank verse himself. In short, he either suffered prejudice

to lead him in a string whithersoever it would, or his taste in poetry was worth little. I don't believe he ever read any thing of that kind with enthusiasm in his life; and as good poetry cannot be composed without a considerable share of that quality in the mind of the author, so neither can it be read or tasted as it ought to be without it.

I have said all this in the morning fasting, but am soon going to my tea. When therefore I shall have told you that we are now, in the course of our printing, in the second book of the *Odyssey*, I shall only have time to add, that I am, my dear friend, most truly yours,

W. C.

I think your Latin quotations very applicable to the present state of France. But France is in a situation new and untried before.

CCLXXV

To John Johnson, Esq.

Feb. 27, 1791.

Now, my dearest Johnny, I must tell thee in few words how much I love and am obliged to thee for thy affectionate services.

My Cambridge honours are all to be ascribed to you, and to you only. Yet you are but a little man; and a little man into the bargain who have kicked the mathematics, their idol, out of your study. So im-

portant are the endings which Providence frequently connects with small beginnings. Had you been here, I could have furnished you with much employment ; for I have so dealt with your fair MSS. in the course of my polishing and improving, that I have almost blotted out the whole. Such however as it is, I must now send it to the printer, and he must be content with it, for there is not time to make a fresh copy. We are now printing the second book of the *Odyssey*.

Should the Oxonians bestow none of their notice on me on this occasion, it will happen singularly enough, that as Pope received all his university honours in the subscription way from Oxford, and none at all from Cambridge, so I shall have received all mine from Cambridge, and none from Oxford. This is the more likely to be the case, because I understand that on whatsoever occasion either of those learned bodies thinks fit to move, the other always makes it a point to sit still, thus proving its superiority.

I shall send up your letter to Lady Hesketh in a day or two, knowing that the intelligence contained in it will afford her the greatest pleasure. Know likewise for your own gratification, that all the Scotch universities have subscribed, none excepted.

We are all as well as usual ; that is to say, as well as reasonable folks expect to be on the crazy side of this frail existence.

I rejoice that we shall so soon have you again at our fireside.

W. C.

CCLXXVI

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

March 6, 1791.

After all this ploughing and sowing on the plains of Troy, once fruitful, such at least to my translating predecessor, some harvest I hope will arise for me also. My long work has received its last, last touches; and I am now giving my preface its final adjustment. We are in the fourth *Odyssey* in the course of our printing, and I expect that I and the swallows shall appear together. They have slept all the winter, but I, on the contrary, have been extremely busy. Yet if I can *virûm volitare per ora* as swiftly as they through the air, I shall account myself well requited. —Adieu!

W. C.

CCLXXVII

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON, March 18, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I give you joy that you are about to receive some more of my elegant prose, and I feel myself in danger of attempting to make it even more elegant than usual, and thereby of spoiling it, under the influence of your commendations. But my old helter-skelter manner has already succeeded so well, that I will not, even

for the sake of entitling myself to a still greater portion of your praise, abandon it.

I did not call in question Johnson's true spirit of poetry, because he was not qualified to relish blank verse (though, to tell you the truth, I think that but an ugly symptom); but if I did not express it I meant however to infer it from the perverse judgment that he has formed of our poets in general; depreciating some of the best, and making honourable mention of others, in my opinion not undeservedly neglected. I will lay you sixpence that, had he lived in the days of Milton, and by any accident had met with his *Paradise Lost*, he would neither have directed the attention of others to it, nor have much admired it himself. Good sense, in short, and strength of intellect, seem to me, rather than a fine taste, to have been his distinguished characteristics. But should you still think otherwise, you have my free permission; for so long as you have yourself a taste for the beauties of Cowper, I care not a fig whether Johnson had a taste or not.

I wonder where you find all your quotations, pat as they are to the present condition of France. Do you make them yourself, or do you actually find them? I am apt to suspect sometimes, that you impose them only on a poor man who has but twenty books in the world, and two of them are your brother Chester's. They are however much to the purpose, be the author of them who he may.

I was very sorry to learn lately that my friend at

Chicheley has been some time indisposed, either with gout or rheumatism, (for it seems to be uncertain which) and attended by Dr. Kerr. I am at a loss to conceive how so temperate a man should acquire the gout, and am resolved therefore to conclude that it must be the rheumatism, which, bad as it is, is in my judgement the best of the two; and will afford me besides some opportunity to sympathize with him, for I am not perfectly exempt from it myself. Distant as you are in situation, you are yet perhaps nearer to him in point of intelligence than I; and if you can send me any particular news of him, pray do it in your next.

I love and thank you for your benediction. If God forgive me my sins, surely I shall love him much, for I have much to be forgiven. But the quantum need not discourage me, since there is one whose atonement can suffice for all.

Τοῦ δὲ καθ' αἷμα ῥέεν, καὶ σοὶ, καὶ ἐμοὶ, καὶ ἀδελφοῖς
Ἡμετέροις, αὐτοῦ σωζομένοις θανάτῳ.

Accept our joint remembrances, and believe me affectionately yours,

W. C.

CCLXXVIII

To Lady Hesketh.

Friday night, March 25, 1791.

MY DEAREST COZ,

Johnson writes me word that he has repeatedly

called on Horace Walpole, and has never found him at home. He has also written to him, and received no answer. I charge thee therefore on thy allegiance, that thou move not a finger more in this business. My back is up, and I cannot bear the thought of wooing him any further, nor would do it, though he were as *pig* a gentleman (look you !) as Lucifer himself. I have Welsh blood in me, if the pedigree of the Donnes say true, and every drop of it says—"Let him alone !"

I should have dined at the Hall to day, having engaged myself to do so ; but an untoward occurrence, that happened last night, or rather this morning, prevented me. It was a thundering rap at the door, just after the clock struck three. First, I thought the house was on fire. Then I thought the Hall was on fire. Then I thought it was a housebreaker's trick. Then I thought it was an express. In any case I thought that if it should be repeated, it would awaken and terrify Mrs. Unwin, and kill her with spasms. The consequence of all these thoughts was the worst nervous fever I ever had in my life, although it was the shortest. The rap was given but once, though a multifarious one. Had I heard a second, I should have risen myself at all adventures. It was the only minute since you went, in which I have been glad that you were not here. Soon after I came down, I learned that a drunken party had passed through the village at that time, and they were no doubt the authors of this witty, but troublesome invention.

Our thanks are due to you for the book you sent us. Mrs. Unwin has read to me several parts of it, which I have much admired. The observations are shrewd and pointed; and there is much wit in the similes and illustrations. Yet a remark struck me, which I could not help making *vivâ voce* on the occasion. If the book has any real value, and does in truth deserve the notice taken of it by those to whom it is addressed, its claim is founded neither on the expression, nor on the style, nor on the wit of it, but altogether on the truth that it contains. Now the same truths are delivered, to my knowledge, perpetually from the pulpit by ministers whom the admirers of this writer would disdain to hear. Yet the truth is not the less important for not being accompanied and recommended by brilliant thoughts and expressions; neither is God, from whom comes all truth, any more a respecter of wit than he is of persons. It will appear soon whether they applaud the book for the sake of its unanswerable arguments, or only tolerate the argument for the sake of the splendid manner in which it is enforced. I wish as heartily that it may do them good, as if I were myself the author of it. But alas! my wishes and hopes are much at variance. It will be the talk of the day, as another publication of the same kind has been; and then the noise of Vanity Fair will drown the voice of the preacher.

I am glad to learn that the Chancellor does not forget me, though more for his sake than my own;

for I see not how he can ever serve a man like me.—
Adieu, my dearest coz.

W. C.

CCLXXIX

To the Rev. John Newton.

March 29, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It affords me sincere pleasure that you enjoy serenity of mind after your great loss. It is well in all circumstances, even in the most afflictive, with those who have God for their comforter. You do me justice in giving entire credit to my expressions of friendship for you. No day passes in which I do not look back to the days that are fled; and consequently, none in which I do not feel myself affectionately reminded of you, and of her whom you have lost for a season. I cannot even see Olney spire from any of the fields in the neighbourhood, much less can I enter the town, and still less the vicarage, without experiencing the force of those mementos, and recollecting a multitude of passages, to which you and yours were parties.

The past would appear a dream, were the remembrance of it less affecting. It was in the most important respects so unlike my present moment, that I am sometimes almost tempted to suppose it a dream. But the difference between dreams and

realities long since elapsed seems to consist chiefly in this,—that a dream, however painful or pleasant at the time, and perhaps for a few ensuing hours, passes like an arrow through the air, leaving no trace of its flight behind it; but our actual experiences make a lasting impression. We review those which interested us much, when they occurred, with hardly less interest than in the first instance; and whether few years or many have intervened, our sensibility makes them still present; such a mere nullity is time, to a creature to whom God gives a feeling heart and the faculty of recollection.

That you have not the first sight, and sometimes, perhaps, have a late one, of what I write, is owing merely to your distant situation. Some things I have written not worth your perusal; and a few, a very few, of such length, that, engaged as I have been to Homer, it has not been possible that I should find opportunity to transcribe them. At the same time, Mrs. Unwin's constant pain in her side has almost forbidden her the use of the pen. She cannot use it long without increasing that pain; for which reason I am more unwilling than herself that she should ever meddle with it. But, whether what I write be a trifle, or whether it be serious, you would certainly, were you present, see them all. Others get a sight of them, by being so, who would never otherwise see them; and I should hardly withhold them from you, whose claim upon me is of so much older a date than theirs. It is not, indeed,

with readiness and good-will that I give them to any body ; for, if I live, I shall probably print them ; and my friends, who are previously well acquainted with them, will have less reason to value the book in which they shall appear. A trifle can have nothing to recommend it but its novelty. I have spoken of giving copies ; but, in fact, I have given none. They who have them made them ; for, till my whole work shall have fairly passed the press, it will not leave me a moment more than is necessarily due to my correspondents. Their number has of late increased upon me, by the addition of many of my maternal relations, who, having found me out about a year since, have behaved to me in the most affectionate manner, and have been singularly serviceable to me in the article of my subscription. Several of them are coming from Norfolk to visit me in the course of the summer.

I enclose a copy of my last mortuary verses. The clerk, for whom they were written, is since dead ; and whether his successor, the late sexton, will choose to be his own dirge-maker, or will employ me, is a piece of important news which has not yet reached me.

Our best remembrances attend yourself and Miss Catlett, and we rejoice in the kind Providence that has given you, in her, so amiable and comfortable a companion.—Adieu, my dear friend, I am sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXX

*To Mrs. Throckmorton.**April 1, 1791.*

MY DEAR MRS. FROG,

A word or two before breakfast ; which is all that I shall have time to send you.—You have not, I hope, forgot to tell Mr. Frog, how much I am obliged to him for his kind though unsuccessful attempt in my favour at Oxford. It seems not a little extraordinary, that persons so nobly patronized themselves on the score of literature, should resolve to give no encouragement to it in return. Should I find a fair opportunity to thank them hereafter, I will not neglect it.

Could Homer come himself, distress'd and poor,
And tune his harp at Rhedycina's door,
The rich old vixen would exclaim (I fear),
“ Begone ! no tramper gets a farthing here.”

I have read your husband's pamphlet through and through. You may think perhaps, and so may he, that a question so remote from all concern of mine could not interest me ; but if you think so, you are both mistaken. He can write nothing that will not interest me ; in the first place, for the writer's sake ; and in the next place, because he writes better and reasons better than any body,—with more candour, and with more sufficiency, and consequently with more satisfaction to all his readers, save only his opponents. They, I think, by this time wish that they had let him alone.

Tom is delighted past measure with his wooden nag, and gallops at a rate that would kill any horse that had a life to lose.—Adieu !

W. C.

CCLXXXI

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON, May 2, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Monday being a day in which Homer has now no demands upon me, I shall give part of the present Monday to you. But it this moment occurs to me, that the proposition with which I begin will be obscure to you, unless followed by an explanation. You are to understand therefore, that Monday being no post-day, I have consequently no proof-sheets to correct, the correction of which is nearly all that I have to do with Homer at present ; I say nearly all, because I am likewise occasionally employed in reading over the whole of what is already printed, that I may make a table of errata to each of the poems. How much is already printed say you?—I answer—the whole *Iliad*, and almost seventeen books of the *Odyssey*.

About a fortnight since, perhaps three weeks, I had a visit from your nephew, Mr. Bagot, and his tutor, Mr. Hurlock, who came hither under conduct of your niece, Miss Barbara. So were the friends of Ulysses conducted to the palace of Antiphates, the Læstrygonian by that monarch's daughter. But mine is no

palace, neither am I a giant, neither did I devour any one of the party ;—on the contrary I gave them chocolate, and permitted them to depart in peace. I was much pleased both with the young man and his tutor. In the countenance of the former I saw much Bagotism, and not less in his manners. I will leave you to guess what I mean by that expression. Physiognomy is a study of which I have almost as high an opinion as Lavater himself, the professor of it, and for this good reason, because it never yet deceived me. But perhaps I shall speak more truly if I say that I am somewhat of an adept in the art, although I have *never studied* it ; for whether I will or not, I judge of every human creature by the countenance, and as I say, have never yet seen reason to repent of my judgment. Sometimes I feel myself powerfully attracted, as I was by your nephew, and sometimes with equal vehemence repulsed, which attraction and repulsion have always been justified in the sequel.

I have lately read, and with more attention than I ever gave to them before, Milton's Latin poems. But these I must make the subject of some future letter, in which it will be ten to one that your friend Samuel Johnson gets another slap or two at the hands of your humble servant. Pray read them yourself, and with as much attention as I did ; then read the Doctor's remarks if you have them, and tell me what you think of both. It will be pretty sport for you on such a day as this, which is the fourth we have had of almost incessant rain. The weather, and a cold the

effect of it, have confined me ever since last Thursday. Mrs. Unwin however is well, and joins me in every good wish to yourself and family.—I am, my good friend, most truly yours,

W. C.

CCLXXXII

To John Johnson, Esq.

WESTON, *June 1, 1791.*

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,

Now you may rest—now I can give you joy of the period, of which I gave you hope in my last; the period of all your labours in my service. But this I can foretell you also, that if you persevere in serving your friends at this rate, your life is likely to be a life of labour:—Yet persevere! your rest will be the sweeter hereafter! In the mean time I wish you, if at any time you should find occasion for him, just such a friend as you have proved to me!

W. C.

CCLXXXIII

To the Rev. Mr. Hurdis.

WESTON, *June 13, 1791.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I ought to have thanked you for your agreeable and entertaining letter much sooner, but I have many correspondents, who will not be said, nay; and have

been obliged of late to give my last attentions to Homer. The very last indeed; for yesterday I dispatched to town, after revising them carefully, the proof sheets of subscribers' names, among which I took special notice of yours, and am much obliged to you for it. We have contrived, or rather my bookseller and printer have contrived (for they have never waited a moment for me,) to publish as critically at the wrong time, as if my whole interest and success had depended upon it. March, April, and May, said Johnson to me in a letter that I received from him in February, are the best months for publication. *Therefore* now it is determined that Homer shall come out on the 1st of July; that is to say, exactly at the moment when, except a few lawyers, not a creature will be left in town who will ever care one farthing about him. To which of these two friends of mine I am indebted for this management, I know not. It does not please; but I would be a philosopher as well as a poet, and therefore make no complaint, or grumble at all about it. You, I presume, have had dealings with them both;—how did they manage for you? And if as they have for me, how did you behave under it? Some who love me complain that I am too passive; and I should be glad of an opportunity to justify myself by your example. The fact is, should I thunder ever so loud, no efforts of that sort will avail me now; therefore like a good economist of my bolts, I choose to reserve them for more profitable occasions.

I am glad to find that your amusements have been so similar to mine ; for in this instance too I seemed to have need of somebody to keep me in countenance, especially in my attention and attachment to animals. All the notice that we lords of the creation vouchsafe to bestow on the creatures, is generally to abuse them ; it is well therefore that here and there a man should be found a little womanish, or perhaps a little childish in this matter, who will make some amends, by kissing, and coaxing, and laying them in one's bosom. You remember the little ewe lamb, mentioned by the prophet Nathan ; the prophet perhaps invented the tale for the sake of its application to David's conscience ; but it is more probable that God inspired him with it for that purpose. If he did, it amounts to a proof that he does not overlook, but on the contrary much notices such little partialities and kindness to his *dumb* creatures, as we, because we articulate, are pleased to call them.

Your sisters are fitter to judge than I, whether assembly rooms are the places of all others, in which the ladies may be studied to most advantage. I am an old fellow, but I had once my dancing days, as you have now ; yet I could never find that I had learned half so much of a woman's real character by dancing with her, as by conversing with her at home, where I could observe her behaviour at the table, at the fireside, and in all the trying circumstances of domestic life. We are all good when we are pleased ; but she is the good woman, who

wants not a fiddle to sweeten her. If I am wrong, the young ladies will set me right; in the mean time I will not tease you with graver arguments on the subject, especially as I have a hope that years, and the study of the Scripture, and His Spirit whose word it is, will in due time bring you to my way of thinking. I am not one of those sages, who require that young men should be as old as themselves before they have had time to be so.—With my love to your fair sisters, I remain, dear sir, most truly yours,

W. C.

CCLXXXIV

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *June 26, 1791.*

Many thanks, my cousin, for the bills, which arrived safe, with all their accompaniments. Money is never unwelcome here, but at this time is especially welcome when servants' wages and house-rent call for it. Mrs. Unwin enjoins me particularly to make you her affectionate acknowledgements both for the bonnet materials and for directions how to make the bonnet.

I am glad that Johnson waited on you, and glad that he acquitted himself so well in your presence; glad too, that he likes my prose, and filled with wonder that he likes my letters, because to him I have hardly sent any but letters of jobation. I verily

believe that though a bookseller, he has in him the soul of a gentleman. Such strange combinations sometimes happen, and such a one may have happened in his instance. We shall see.

Johnny Higgins shall have his waistcoat to-morrow, together with a note in which I will tell him all that you say concerning his performance in the drawing way. Your gift will not be the less acceptable to him because, being in mourning, he cannot wear it at present. It is perfectly elegant, and he will always be, and will always have cause to be, proud of it. He mourns for his mother, who died about three weeks since, which, when I wrote last, I forgot to mention. You know, I believe, that she had ill health, and was subject to violent pains in her stomach. A fit of that sort seized her; she was attended by a nurse in the night, whom she ordered down stairs to get her some broth, and when the woman returned she was dead.

It gives us true pleasure that you interest yourself so much in the state of our turnpike. Learn then the present state of it. From Gayhurst to Weston the road is a gravel-walk, but Weston itself is at present in a chaotic condition. About three weeks since they dug up the street, and having done so, left it. But it will not continue long in such disorder, and when you see it next you will find the village wonderfully improved. Already they have filled up two abominable ponds more foetid than any human nostrils could endure; they were to be

found as you must remember, one just under Farmer Archer's window, and the other a little beyond it. Covered drains are to be made wherever drains are wanted, and the causey is to be new-laid. When all this is done and the road well gravelled, we will hold our heads as high as any villagers in the kingdom. At the present time they are at work on the road from Weston to Olney. Olney is also itself in a state of beautification, and the road between Olney and Bedford is, I believe, nearly finished, but that I have never seen. The sooner you come to look at these things with your own eyes, the better.

I have hardly left myself room to tell you a story which yet I must tell, but as briefly as possible. While I reposed myself yesterday evening in the shop of Mr. Palmer, lying at my length on the counter, a labouring man came in. He wanted a hat for his boy, and having bought one at two shillings, said he must have a handkerchief for himself, a silk one, to wear about his neck on Sundays. After much bargaining he suited himself with one at last for four shillings and sixpence. I liked the man's looks, and having just one shilling in my purse, I held it to him, saying: Here, honest friend, here's something towards paying for your purchase! He took the shilling and looked at me steadily for a long time, saying nothing. At last his surprise burst forth in these words—I never saw such a gentleman in my life! He then faced

about, and was again for a long time silent ; but at last, turning to me again he said—If I had known you had been so stout I would have had a better. Mr. Andrews told him that the cutting off would make no difference to him, and he might have a better if he pleased, so he took one at the price of five shillings, and went away all astonishment at my great bounty. I have learned since that he is a very worthy industrious fellow, and has a mother between seventy and eighty, who walks every Sunday eight miles to hearing, as they call it, and back again. This is another instance that my skill in physiognomy never deceives me.—Adieu, my dearest coz. With the love of all here, I remain, ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXXV

To the Rev. William Bull, Brighton, Sussex.

WESTON, *July 27, 1791.*

MY DEAR MR. BULL,

Mindful of my promise I take the pen, though fearing, and with reason enough, that the performance will be hardly worth the postage. Such as it is however, here it comes, and if you like it not, you must thank yourself for it.

I have blest myself on your account that you are at Brighton and not at Birmingham, where it seems they are so loyal and so pious that they show no

mercy to dissenters.¹ How can you continue in a persuasion so offensive to the wise and good ! Do you not yet perceive that the Bishops themselves hate you not more than the very blacksmith of the establishment, and will you not endeavour to get the better of your aversion to red-nosed singing men and organs ? Come—be received into the bosom of mother-church, so shall you never want a jig for your amusement on Sundays, and shall save perhaps your academy from a conflagration.

As for me, I go on at the old rate, giving all my time to Homer, who I suppose was a Presbyterian too, for I understand that the church of England will by no means acknowledge him as one of hers. He, I say, has all my time, except a little that I give every day to no very cheering prospects of futurity. I would I were a Hottentot, or even a dissenter, so that my views of an hereafter were more comfortable. But such as I am, hope, if it please God, may visit even me ; and should we ever meet again, possibly we may part no more. Then, if Presbyterians ever find the way to heaven, you and I may know each other in that better world, and rejoice in the recital of the terrible things that we endured in this. I will wager sixpence with you now, that when that day comes, you shall acknowledge my story a more wonderful one than yours ;—only order your executors to

¹ In July 1791 the mob of Birmingham expressed their disapprobation of Joseph Priestley's political and religious opinions, by tearing up his manuscripts and burning down his house and chapel. Priestley himself and his family escaped their violence by flight.

put sixpence in your mouth when they bury you, that you may have wherewithal to pay me.

I have received a long letter from an unknown somebody, filled with the highest eulogiums on my Homer. This has raised my spirits and is the true cause of all the merriment with which I have greeted you this morning. Pardon me, as Vellum says in the Comedy, for being jocular. Mrs. Unwin joins me in love to yourself and your very good son, and we both hope and both sincerely wish to hear of Mrs. Bull's recovery.—Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXXVI

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON, Aug. 2, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I was much obliged, and still feel myself much obliged to Lady Bagot, for the visit with which she favoured me. Had it been possible that I could have seen Lord Bagot too, I should have been completely happy. For, as it happened, I was that morning in better spirits than usual; and though I arrived late, and after a long walk, and extremely hot, which is a circumstance very apt to disconcert me, yet I was not disconcerted half so much as I generally am at the sight of a stranger, especially of a stranger lady, and more especially at the sight of a stranger lady of

quality. When the servant told me that Lady Bagot was in the parlour, I felt my spirits sink ten degrees ; but the moment I saw her, at least when I had been a minute in her company, I felt them rise again, and they soon rose even above their former pitch. I know two ladies of fashion now, whose manners have this effect upon me. The Lady in question, and the Lady Spencer. I am a shy animal, and want much kindness to make me easy. Such I shall be to my dying day.

Here sit *I*, calling myself *shy*, yet have just published by the *by*, two great volumes of poetry.

This reminds me of Ranger's observation in *The Suspicious Husband*, who says to somebody, I forget whom—" *There is a degree of assurance in you modest men, that we impudent fellows can never arrive at !*"—Assurance indeed ! Have you seen 'em ? What do you think they are ? Nothing less I can tell you than a translation of Homer. Of the sublimest poet in the world. That's all. Can I ever have the impudence to call myself shy again ?

You live, I think, in the neighbourhood of Birmingham ? What must you not have felt on the late alarming occasion ! You I suppose could see the fires from your windows. We, who only heard the news of them, have trembled. Never sure was religious zeal more terribly manifested, or more to the prejudice of its own cause.—Adieu, my dear friend. I am, with Mrs. Unwin's best compliments, ever yours,

W. C.

CCLXXXVII

*To the Rev. Mr. Hurdis.*WESTON, *Aug. 9, 1791.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I never make a correspondent wait for an answer through idleness, or want of proper respect for him ; but if I am silent it is because I am busy, or not well, or because I stay till something occurs, that may make my letter at least a little better than mere blank paper. I therefore write speedily in reply to yours, being at present neither much occupied, nor at all indisposed, nor forbidden by a dearth of materials.

I wish always when I have a new piece in hand to be as secret as you, and there was a time when I could be so. Then I lived the life of a solitary, was not visited by a single neighbour, because I had none with whom I could associate ; nor ever had an inmate. This was when I dwelt at Olney ; but since I have removed to Weston the case is different. Here I am visited by all around me, and study in a room exposed to all manner of inroads. It is on the ground floor, the room in which we dine, and in which I am sure to be found by all who seek me. They find me generally at my desk, and with my work, whatever it be, before me, unless perhaps I have conjured it into its hiding place before they have had time to enter. This, however, is not always the case, and consequently, sooner or later, I cannot fail to be

detected. Possibly you, who I suppose have a snug study, would find it impracticable to attend to any thing closely in an apartment exposed as mine; but use has made it familiar to me, and so familiar, that neither servants going and coming disconcert me; nor even if a lady, with an oblique glance of her eye, catches two or three lines of my MS., do I feel myself inclined to blush, though naturally the shyest of mankind.

You did well, I believe, to cashier the subject of which you gave me a recital. It certainly wants those *agrémens*, which are necessary to the success of any subject in verse. It is a curious story, and so far as the poor young lady was concerned a very affecting one; but there is a coarseness in the character of the hero, that would have spoiled all. In fact, I find it myself a much easier matter to write, than to get a convenient theme to write on.

I am obliged to you for comparing me as you go both with Pope and with Homer. It is impossible in any other way of management to know whether the Translation be well executed or not, and if well, in what degree. It was in the course of such a process, that I first became dissatisfied with Pope. More than thirty years since, and when I was a young Templar, I accompanied him with his original, line by line, through both poems. A fellow student of mine, a person of fine classic taste, joined himself with me in the labour. We were neither of us, as you may imagine, very diligent in our proper business.

I shall be glad if my reviewers, whosoever they may be, will be at the pains to read me as you do. I want no praise that I am not entitled to; but of that to which I am entitled I should be loth to lose a tittle, having worked hard to earn it.

I would heartily second the Bishop of Salisbury in recommending to you a close pursuit of your Hebrew studies, were it not that I wish you to publish what I may understand. Do both, and I shall be satisfied.

Your remarks, if I may but receive them soon enough to serve me in case of a new edition, will be extremely welcome.

W. C.

CCLXXXVIII

To Lady Hesketh.

THE LODGE, *Aug. 30, 1791.*

MY DEAREST COZ,

The walls of Ogressa's chamber shall be furnished elegantly as they can be, and at little cost; and when you see them you shall cry—Bravo! Bedding we have, but two chairs will be wanting, the servants' hall having engaged all our supernumeraries. These you will either send or give us commission to buy them. Such as will suit may be found probably at Maurice Smith's, of house-furnishing memory; and this latter course I should think the best, because

they are of all things most liable to fracture in a waggon.

I know not how it can have happened that Homer is such a secret at Tunbridge, for I can tell you that his fame is on the wing, and flies rapidly. Johnson, however, seems to be clear from blame; and when you recollect that the whole edition is his by purchase, and that he has no possible way to get his money again but by the sale of it, thou thyself wilt think so. A tradesman,—an old stager too, may safely be trusted with his own interest.

I have spoken big words about Homer's fame, and bigger perhaps than my intelligence will justify, for I have not heard much, but what I have heard has been pretty much to the purpose. First, little Johnny going through Cambridge, in his way home, learned from his tutor there that it had found many admirers amongst the best qualified judges of that university, and that they were very liberal of their praises. Secondly, Mr. Rye wrote me word lately that a certain candid fair critic and excellent judge, of the county of Northampton, gives it high encomiums. Thirdly, Mr. Rye came over himself from Gayhurst yesterday on purpose to tell me how much he was delighted with it. He had just been reading the sixth *Iliad*, and comparing it with Pope and with the original, and professed himself enchanted. Fourthly, Mr. Frog is much pleased with it; and fifthly, Henry Cowper is bewitched with it; and sixthly, so are—you and I,—*ça suffit*.

But now if thou hast the faculty of erecting thy ears, lift them into the air, first taking off thy cap, that they may have the highest possible elevation. Mrs. Unwin says,—No, don't tell her ladyship all,—tell her only enough to raise her curiosity, that she may come the sooner to Weston to have it gratified. But I say,—Yes, I will tell her all, lest she should be overcharged and burst by the way.

The Chancellor and I, my dear, have had a correspondence on the subject of Homer. He had doubts it seems about the propriety of translating him in blank verse, and wrote to Henry to tell him so, adding a translation of his own in rhyme of the speech of Achilles to Phoenix, in the ninth book ; and referring him to me, who, he said, could elevate it, and polish it, and give it the tone of Homer. Henry sent this letter to me, and I answered it in one to his lordship, but not meddling with his verses, for I remembered what happened between Gil Blas and the Archbishop of Toledo. His lordship sent me two sheets in reply, filled with arguments in favour of rhyme, which I was to answer if I could ; and containing another translation of the same passage, only in blank verse, leaving it to me to give it rhyme, to make it close, and faithful, and poetical. All this I performed as best I could, and yesterday I heard from him again. In this last letter he says,—“ I am clearly convinced that Homer may be best translated *without* rhyme, and that you have succeeded in the passages I have looked into.”

Such is the candour of a wise man and a real

scholar. I would to Heaven that all prejudiced persons were like him!—I answered this letter immediately; and here, I suppose, our correspondence ends. Have I not made a great convert? You shall see the letters, both his and mine, when you come.

My picture hangs in the study. I will not tell thee what others think of it; but thou shalt judge for thyself. I altogether approve Mrs. Carter's sentiments upon the Birmingham riots, and admire her manner of expressing them. The Frogs come down to-day, bringing Catharina with them. Mrs. Frog has caught cold, as I hear, in her journey; therefore how she may be now I know not, but before she went she was well and in excellent spirits. I rejoice that thy poor lungs can play freely, and shall be happy when they can do the same at Weston. My eyes are weak, and somewhat inflamed, and have never been well this month past.

Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well,—that is, much as usual. She joins me in best love, and in every thing that you can wish us both to feel for you.—Adieu, my dearest coz, ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

CCLXXXIX

To Clotworthy Rowley, Esq.

WESTON UNDERWOOD,
Oct. 22, 1791.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,

How often am I to be mortified by hearing that you

have been within sixty miles of me, and have taken your flight again to an immeasurable distance? Will you never in one of these excursions to England, (three of which at least you have made since we have had intercourse by letter,)—will you never find your way to Weston? Consider that we are neither of us immortal, and that if we do not contrive to meet before we are fifty years older, our meeting in this world at least will be an affair altogether hopeless; for by that time your travelling days will be over, as mine have been these many years.

I often think of Carr, and shall always think of him with affection. Should I never see him more, I shall never, I trust, be capable of forgetting his indefatigable attention to me during the last year I spent in London. Two years after I invited him to Huntingdon, where I lived at that time, but he pleaded some engagement, and I have neither seen him nor heard of him, except from yourself, from that hour to the present. I know by experience with what reluctance we move when we have been long fixed; but could he prevail on himself to move hither he would make me very happy; and when you write to him next you may tell him so.

I have to tell you in answer to your question, what I am doing,—that I am preparing to appear in a new character, not as an author, but as an editor;—editor of Milton's Poetical Works, which are about to be published in a more splendid style than ever yet. My part of the business is to translate the Latin and

Italian pieces, to settle the text, to select notes from others, and to write notes of my own. At present the translation employs me ; when that shall be finished, I must begin to read all the books that I can scrape together, of which either Milton or his works are the subject ; and that done shall proceed to my commentary. Few people have studied Milton more, or are more familiar with his poetry, than myself ; but I never looked into him yet with the eyes of an annotator : therefore whether I may expect much or little difficulty, I know no more than you do, but I shall be occupied in the business, no doubt these two years. Fuseli is to be the painter, and will furnish thirty capital pictures to the engraver.

I have little poems in plenty, but nothing that I can send to Ireland, unless you could put me into a way of conveying them thither at free cost, for should you be obliged to pay for them, *le jeu ne vaudra pas les chandelles*.

I rejoice that your family are all well, and in every thing that conduces to your happiness. Adieu, my good, old, and valued friend ; permit me to thank you once more for your kind services in the matter of my subscription, and believe me most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCXC

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

THE LODGE, Dec. 21, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It grieves me, after having indulged a little hope that I might see you in the holidays, to be obliged to disappoint myself. The occasion too is such as will ensure me your sympathy.

On Saturday last, while I was at my desk near the window, and Mrs. Unwin at the fireside, opposite to it, I heard her suddenly exclaim, "Oh! Mr. Cowper, don't let me fall!" I turned and saw her actually falling, together with her chair, and started to her side just in time to prevent her. She was seized with a violent giddiness, which lasted, though with some abatement, the whole day, and was attended too with some other very, very alarming symptoms. At present however she is relieved from the vertigo, and seems in all respects better.

She has been my faithful and affectionate nurse for many years, and consequently has a claim on all my attentions. She has them, and will have them as long as she wants them; which will probably be, at the best, a considerable time to come. I feel the shock, as you may suppose, in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it. Another such a stroke upon her would, I think, upset me completely; but at present I hold up bravely.

W. C.

CCXCI

*To the Rev. John Newton.**March 18, 1792.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We are now once more reduced to our dual state, having lost our neighbours at the Hall, and our inmate Lady Hesketh. Mr. Rose, indeed, has spent two or three days here, and is still with us : but he leaves us in the afternoon. There are those in the world whom we love, and whom we are happy to see ; but we are happy likewise in each other, and so far independent of our fellow mortals, as to be able to pass our time comfortably without them,—as comfortably, at least, as Mrs. Unwin's frequent indispositions, and my no less frequent troubles of mind, will permit. When I am much distressed, any company but hers distresses me more, and makes me doubly sensible of my sufferings ; though sometimes, I confess, it falls out otherwise ; and by the help of more general conversation, I recover that elasticity of mind which is able to resist the pressure. On the whole, I believe, I am situated exactly as I should wish to be, were my situation to be determined on by my own election ; and am denied no comfort that is compatible with the total absence of the chief of all.

William Peace called on me, I forget when,—but about a year ago. His errand was to obtain from me a certificate of his good behaviour during the time he

had lived with us. His conduct in our service had been such, for sobriety and integrity, as entitled him to it ; and I readily gave him one. At the same time, I confess myself not at all surprised that the family to which you recommended him soon grew weary of him. He had a bad temper that always sat astride on a runaway tongue, and ceased not to spur and to kick it into all the sin and mischief that such an ungovernable member, so ridden, was sure to fall into. He had no sooner quitted us, which he did when he married, than he made even us, who had always treated him with kindness, a mark for his slanderous humour. What he said we know not, because we chose not to know ; but such things we were assured, and credibly too, as had we known them, would have been extremely offensive to us. Whether he be a Christian or not, is no business of mine to determine. There was a time when he seemed to have Christian experience, and there has been a much longer time in which, his attendance on ordinances excepted, he has manifested, I doubt, no one symptom of the Christian character. Prosperity did him harm : adversity, perhaps, may do him good. I wish it may ; and if he be indeed a pupil of divine grace, it certainly will, when he has been sufficiently exercised with it ; of which he seems, at present, to have a very promising prospect.

You judge well concerning the Prince, and better than I did. His seducers are certainly most to be blamed, and so I have been used both to say and to

think ; but when I wrote my last, they happened not to occur to me. That he and all dissolute princes are entitled to compassion on account of the snares to which their situation exposes them, is likewise a remark which I have frequently made myself, but did not on that occasion advert to it. But the day is come when it behoves princes to be a little more cautious. These allowances will not be made by the many, especially they will be apt to censure their excesses with a good deal of severity, if themselves should be called upon to pay the piper. That our royal hopes are not a little more discreet in their management at such a time as this seems utterly unaccountable, unless on a supposition that their practices have brought them to a state of blind and frantic desperation that will not suffer them to regard the consequences. The ministers of sedition are busy,—indefatigable indeed, and the expense that attends a kingly government is an argument which millions begin to feel the force of. But I shall tire you with my politics, and the more perhaps because they are so gloomy. The sable cloud, however, has a luminous edge. The unmanageable prince and the no less unmanageable multitude, have each a mouth into which God can thrust a curb when he pleases, and kings shall reign and the people obey to the last moment of his appointment.

Adieu, my dear friend ; with our united love to yourself and Miss Catlett.—I remain affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

Mr. Rose desires his respectful compliments.

CCXCII

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, *April 6, 1792.*

God grant that this friendship of ours may be a comfort to us all the rest of our days, in a world where true friendships are rarities, and especially where suddenly formed they are apt soon to terminate! But, as I said before, I feel a disposition of heart toward you that I never felt for one whom I had never seen; and that shall prove itself, I trust, in the event a propitious omen. . . .

Horace says somewhere,¹ though I may quote it amiss perhaps, for I have a terrible memory,—

*Utrumque nostrum incredibili modo
Consentit astrum.*————

. . . . Our *stars consent*, at least have had an influence somewhat similar in another and more important article.—— . . .

It gives me the sincerest pleasure that I may hope to see you at Weston; for as to any migrations of mine, they must, I fear, notwithstanding the joy I should feel in being a guest of yours, be still considered in the light of impossibilities. Come then, my friend, and be as welcome, as the country people say here, as the flowers in May! I am happy, as I say, in the expectation; but the fear, or rather the consciousness

¹ In the ode to Mæccnas, bk. ii. ode 17. The quotation is correct.

that I shall not answer on a nearer view, makes it a trembling kind of happiness, and a doubtful.

After the privacy which I have mentioned above, I went to Huntingdon; soon after my arrival there, I took up my quarters at the house of the Rev. Mr. Unwin; I lived with him while he lived, and ever since his death have lived with his widow. Her, therefore, you will find mistress of the house; and I judge of you amiss, or you will find her just such as you would wish. To me she has been often a nurse, and invariably the kindest friend through a thousand adversities that I have had to grapple with in the course of almost thirty years. I thought it better to introduce her to you thus, than to present her to you at your coming, quite a stranger.

Bring with you any books that you think may be useful to my commentatorship, for with you for an interpreter I shall be afraid of none of them. And in truth, if you think that you shall want them, you must bring books for your own use also, for they are an article with which I am *heinously unprovided*; being much in the condition of the man whose library Pope describes as

No mighty store,
His own works neatly bound, and little more!

You shall know how this has come to pass hereafter.

Tell me, my friend, are your letters in your own handwriting? If so, I am in pain for your eyes, lest by such frequent demands upon them I should hurt them. I had rather write you three letters for one,

much as I prize your letters, than *that* should happen. And now for the present, adieu;—I am going to accompany Milton into the lake of fire and brimstone, having just begun my annotations.

W. C.

CCXCIII

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

April 15, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I thank you for your remittance; which to use the language of a song much in use when we were boys,

Adds fresh beauties to the spring,
And makes all nature look more gay.

What the author of the song had particularly in view when he thus sang, I know not; but probably it was not the sum of fifty pounds; which, as probably, he never had the happiness to possess. It was, most probably, some beautiful nymph,—beautiful in his eyes, at least,—who has long since become an old woman.

I have heard about my wether mutton from various quarters. First, from a sensible little man, curate of a neighbouring village; then from Walter Bagot; then from Henry Cowper; and now from you. It was a blunder hardly pardonable in a man who has lived amid fields and meadows grazed by sheep, almost these thirty years. I have accordingly satirized

myself in two stanzas which I composed last night while I lay awake, tormented with pain, and well dosed with laudanum. If you find them not very brilliant, therefore, you will know how to account for it.

Cowper had sinn'd with some excuse,
If, bound in rhyming tethers,
He had committed this abuse
Of changing ewes for wethers ;

But, male for female is a trope,
Or rather bold misnomer,
That would have startled even Pope,
When he translated Homer.

Having translated all the Latin and Italian Mil-tonics, I was proceeding merrily with the Commentary on the *Paradise Lost*, when I was seized, a week since, with a most tormenting disorder ; which has qualified me, however, to make some very feeling observations on that passage when I shall come to it :

———Ill fare our ancestor impure.

For this we may thank Adam ;—and you may thank him too, that I am not able to fill my sheet, nor endure a writing posture any longer. I conclude abruptly, therefore ; but sincerely subscribing myself, with my best compliments to Mrs. Hill, your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

CCXCIV

*To Lady Hesketh.*WESTON, *May 24, 1792.*

I wish with all my heart, my dearest coz, that I had not ill news for the subject of the present letter. My friend, my Mary, has again been attacked by the same disorder that threatened me last year with the loss of her, and of which you were yourself a witness. Gregson would not allow that first stroke to be paralytic, but this he acknowledges to be so; and with respect to the former, I never had myself any doubt that it was; but this has been much the severest. Her speech has been almost unintelligible from the moment that she was struck; it is with difficulty that she opens her eyes, and she cannot keep them open, the muscles necessary to the purpose being contracted; and as to self-moving powers, from place to place, and the use of her right hand and arm, she has entirely lost them.

It has happened well, that of all men living the man most qualified to assist and comfort me is here, though till within these few days I never saw him, and a few weeks since had no expectation that I ever should. You have already guessed that I mean Hayley. Hayley who loves me as if he had known me from my cradle. When he returns to town, as he must, alas! too soon, he will pay his respects to you.

I will not conclude without adding that our poor

patient is beginning, I hope, to recover from this stroke also; but her amendment is slow, as must be expected at her time of life and in such a disorder. I am as well myself as you have ever known me in a time of much trouble, and even better.

It was not possible to prevail on Mrs. Unwin to let me send for Dr. Kerr, but Hayley has written to his friend Dr. Austin a representation of her case, and we expect his opinion and advice to-morrow. In the mean time, we have borrowed an electrical machine from our neighbour Socket, the effect of which she tried yesterday, and the day before, and we think it has been of material service.

She was seized while Hayley and I were walking, and Mr. Greatheed, who called while we were absent, was with her.

I forgot in my last to thank thee for the proposed amendments of thy friend. Whoever he is, make my compliments to him, and thank him. The passages to which he objects have been all altered; and when he shall see them new dressed, I hope he will like them better.

W. C.

CCXCV

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, June 4, 1792.

ALL'S WELL;

Which words I place as conspicuously as possible,

and prefix them to my letter, to save you the pain, my friend and brother, of a moment's anxious speculation. Poor Mary proceeds in her amendment still, and improves, I think, even at a swifter rate than when you left her. The stronger she grows, the faster she gathers strength, which is perhaps the natural course of recovery. She walked so well this morning, that she told me at my first visit she had entirely forgot her illness; and she spoke so distinctly, and had so much of her usual countenance, that, had it been possible, she would have made me forget it too.

Returned from my walk, blown to tatters—found two dear things in the study, your letter, and my Mary! She is bravely well, and your beloved epistle does us both good. I found your kind pencil note in my song-book, as soon as I came down on the morning of your departure; and Mary was vexed to the heart, that the simpletons who watched her supposed her asleep, when she was not; for she learned soon after you were gone, that you would have peeped at her, had you known her to have been awake. I perhaps might have had a peep too, and therefore was as vexed as she; but if it please God, we shall make ourselves large amends for all lost peeps by and by at Eartham.¹

W. C.

¹ Hayley's home in Sussex, about six miles from Chichester and five from Arundel. His father bought the land in 1743 and built a small villa. Hayley settled there in 1774, embellished the garden, improved the house, and made it a delightful residence. Gibbon called it the little Paradise of Eartham. See R. Southey's *Life of Cowper*, vol. iii. pp. 61 sqq.

CCXCVI

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, June 5, 1792.

Yesterday was a noble day with us—speech almost perfect—eyes open almost the whole day, without any effort to keep them so ; and the step wonderfully improved. But the night has been almost a sleepless one, owing partly I believe to her having had as much sleep again as usual the night before ; for even when she is in tolerable health she hardly ever sleeps well two nights together. I found her accordingly a little out of spirits this morning, but still insisting on it that she is better. Indeed she always tells me so, and will probably die with those very words upon her lips. They will be true then at least, for then she will be best of all. She is now (the clock has just struck eleven) endeavouring, I believe, to get a little sleep, for which reason I do not yet let her know that I have received your letter.

Can I ever honour you enough for your zeal to serve me? Truly I think not: I am however so sensible of the love I owe you on this account, that I every day regret the acuteness of your feelings for me, convinced that they expose you to much trouble, mortification, and disappointment. I have in short a poor opinion of my destiny, as I told you when you were here ; and though I believe that if any man living can do me good, you will, I cannot yet persuade

myself that even you will be successful in attempting it. But it is no matter, you are yourself a good which I can never value enough, and whether rich or poor in other respects, I shall always account myself better provided for than I deserve, with such a friend at my back as you. Let it please God to continue to me my William and Mary, and I will be more reasonable than to grumble.

I rose this morning wrapped round with a cloud of melancholy, and with a heart full of fears; but if I see Mary's amendment a little advanced, when she rises, I shall be better.

I have just been with her again. Except that she is fatigued for want of sleep, she seems as well as yesterday. The post brings me a letter from Hurdis, who is broken-hearted for a dying sister. Had we eyes sharp enough, we should see the arrows of Death flying in all directions, and account it a wonder that we and our friends escape them a single day.

W. C.

CCXCVII

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, *June 19, 1792.*

My Mary goes on well. Be it known to you that we have these four days discarded our sedan with two elbows. Here is no more carrying, or being carried, but she walks upstairs boldly, with one hand upon

the balustrade, and the other under my arm, and in like manner she comes down in a morning. Still I confess she is feeble, and misses much of her former strength. The weather, too, is sadly against her ; it deprives her of many a good turn in the orchard, and fifty times have I wished this very day that Dr. Darwin's scheme of giving rudders and sails to the Ice Islands, that spoil all our summers, were actually put into practice. So should we have gentle airs instead of churlish blasts ; and those everlasting sources of bad weather being once navigated into the southern hemisphere, my Mary would recover as fast again. We are both of your mind respecting the journey to Eartham, and think that July, if by that time she have strength for the journey, will be better than August. We shall have more long days before us, and then we shall want as much for our return as for our going forth. This, however, must be left to the Giver of all good. If our visit to you be according to His will, He will smooth the way before us, and appoint the time of it ; and I thus speak, not because I wish to seem a saint in your eyes, but because my poor Mary actually is one, and would not set her foot over the threshold unless she had, or thought she had, God's free permission. With that she would go through floods and fire, though without it she would be afraid of everything,—afraid even to visit you, dearly as she loves, and much as she longs to see you.

W. C.

CCXCVIII

*To Mr. Joseph Johnson, St. Paul's Church-
yard, London.*

WESTON UNDERWOOD,
July 8, 1792.

DEAR SIR,

*Truditur dies die,
Novæque pergunt interire lunæ.*

Days, weeks, and months escape me, and nothing is done, nor is it possible for me to do any thing that demands study and attention in the present state of our family. I am the electrician ; I am the escort into the garden ; I am wanted, in short, on a hundred little occasions that occur every day in Mrs. Unwin's present state of infirmity ; and I see no probability that I shall be less occupied in the same indispensable duties for a long time to come. The time fixed in your proposals for publication meanwhile steals on ; and I have lately felt my engagement for Milton bear upon my spirits with a pressure which, added to the pressure of some other private concerns, is almost more than they are equal to. Tell me if you expect to be punctual to your assignation with the public, and that the artists will be ready with their part of the business so soon as the spring of 94 ? I cannot bear to be waited for, neither shall I be able to perform my part of the work with any success if I am hunted ; and I ask this question thus early lest my own distress should increase, and should ultimately

prove a distress to you. My translations are finished, and when I have finished also the revisal of them, will be, I believe, tolerably well executed. They shall be heartily at your service, if by this unhappy interception my time should be so shortened as to forbid my doing more.

Your speedy answer will oblige yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

There is one Richard Coleman in the world, whom I have educated from an infant, and who is utterly good for nothing ; but he is at present in great trouble, the fruit of his own folly. I send him, by this post, an order upon you for eight guineas.

CCXCIX

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, July 22, 1792.

This important affair, my dear brother, is at last decided, and we are coming. Wednesday se'nnight, if nothing occur to make a later day necessary, is the day fixed for our journey. Our rate of travelling must depend on Mary's ability to bear it. Our mode of travelling will occupy three days unavoidably, for we shall come in a coach. Abbot finishes my picture to-morrow ; on Wednesday he returns to town, and is commissioned to order one down for us, with four steeds to draw it ;

————— "hollow pamper'd jades of Asia,
That cannot go but forty miles a day."

Send us our route, for I am as ignorant of it almost, as if I were in a strange country. We shall reach St. Alban's, I suppose, the first day; say where we must finish our second day's journey, and at what inn we may best repose? As to the end of the third day, we know where that will find us, viz. in the arms, and under the roof of our beloved Hayley.

General Cowper, having heard a rumour of this intended migration, desires to meet me on the road, that we may once more see each other. He lives at Ham, near Kingston. Shall we go through Kingston, or near it? For I would give him as little trouble as possible, though he offers very kindly to come as far as Barnet for that purpose. Nor must I forget Carwardine, who so kindly desired to be informed what way we should go. On what point of the road will it be easiest for him to find us? On all these points you must be my oracle. My friend and brother, we shall overwhelm you with our numbers; this is all the trouble that I have left. My Johnny of Norfolk, happy in the thought of accompanying us, would be broken-hearted to be left behind.

In the midst of all these solitudes I laugh to think what they are made of, and what an important thing it is for me to travel. Other men steal away from their homes silently, and make no disturbance; but when I move, houses are turned upside down, maids are turned out of their beds, all the counties through

which I pass appear to be in an uproar. Surrey greets me by the mouth of the General, and Essex by that of Carwardine. How strange does all this seem to a man who has seen no bustle, and made none, for twenty years together!—Adieu,

W. C.

CCC

To the Rev. William Bull.

July 25, 1792.

MY DEAR MR. BULL,

Engaged as I have been ever since I saw you, it was not possible that I should write sooner; and busy as I am at present, it is not without difficulty that I can write even now: but I promised you a letter, and must endeavour, at least, to be as good as my word. How do you imagine I have been occupied these last ten days? In sitting, not on cockatrice eggs nor yet to gratify a mere idle humour, nor because I was too sick to move; but because my cousin Johnson has an aunt who has a longing desire of my picture, and because he would, therefore, bring a painter from London to draw it. For this purpose I have been sitting, as I say, these ten days; and am heartily glad that my sitting time is over. You have now, I know, a burning curiosity to learn two things, which I may choose whether I will tell you or not. First, who was the painter; and secondly, how he has succeeded. The painter's name is Abbot. You never heard of

him, you say. It is very likely ; but there is, nevertheless, such a painter, and an excellent one he is. *Multa sunt quæ bonus Bernardus nec vidit, nec audivit.* To your second enquiry I answer, that he has succeeded to admiration. The likeness is so strong, that when my friends enter the room where my picture is, they start, astonished to see me where they know I am not. Miserable man that you are, to be at Brighton instead of being here, to contemplate this prodigy of art, which, therefore, you can never see ; for it goes to London next Monday, to be suspended awhile at Abbot's ; and then proceeds into Norfolk, where it will be suspended for ever.

But the picture is not the only prodigy I have to tell you of. A greater belongs to me ; and one that you will hardly credit, even on my own testimony. We are on the eve of a journey, and a long one. On this very day se'nnight we set out for Eartham, the seat of my brother bard, Mr. Hayley, on the other side of London, nobody knows where, a hundred and twenty miles off. Pray for us, my friend, that we may have a safe going and return. It is a tremendous exploit, and I feel a thousand anxieties when I think of it. But a promise, made to him when he was here, that we would go if we could, and a sort of persuasion that we can if we will, oblige us to it. The journey and the change of air, together with the novelty to us of the scene to which we are going, may, I hope, be useful to us both ; especially to Mrs. Unwin, who has most need of restoratives. She sends her love to you

and to Thomas, in which she is sincerely joined by
your affectionate

W. C.

CCCI

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, July 29, 1792.

Through floods and flames to your retreat
I win my desperate way,
And when we meet, if e'er we meet,
Will echo your huzza !

You will wonder at the word *desperate* in the second line, and at the *if* in the third ; but could you have any conception of the fears I have had to battle with, of the dejection of spirits that I have suffered concerning this journey, you would wonder much more that I still courageously persevere in my resolution to undertake it. Fortunately for my intentions, it happens, that as the day approaches my terrors abate ; for had they continued to be what they were a week since, I must, after all, have disappointed you ; and was actually once on the verge of doing it. I have told you something of my nocturnal experiences, and assure you now, that they were hardly ever more terrific than on this occasion. Prayer has, however, opened my passage at last, and obtained for me a degree of confidence, that I trust will prove a comfortable viaticum to me all the way. On Wednesday, therefore, we set forth.

The terrors that I have spoken of, would appear ridiculous to most ; but to you they will not, for you are a reasonable creature, and know well, that to whatever cause it be owing (whether to constitution, or to God's express appointment), I am hunted by spiritual hounds in the night season. I cannot help it. You will pity me, and wish it were otherwise ; and though you may think there is much of the imaginary in it, will not deem it for that reason an evil less to be lamented. So much for fears and distresses. Soon I hope they shall all have a joyful termination, and I, my Mary, my Johnny, and my dog, be skipping with delight at Eartham.

Well ! this picture is at last finished, and well finished, I can assure you. Every creature that has seen it has been astonished at the resemblance. Sam's boy bowed to it, and Beau walked up to it wagging his tail as he went, and evidently showing that he acknowledged its likeness to his master. It is a half-length, as it is technically, but absurdly called ; that is to say, it gives all but the foot and ankle. Tomorrow it goes to town, and will hang some months at Abbot's, when it will be sent to its due destination in Norfolk.

I hope, or rather, wish, that at Eartham I may recover that habit of study, which, inveterate as it once seemed, I now seem to have lost,—lost to such a degree, that it is even painful to me to think of what it will cost me to acquire it again.

Adieu ! my dear, dear Hayley ; God give us a

happy meeting! Mary sends her love. She is in pretty good plight this morning, having slept well, and for her part, has no fears at all about the journey.

—Ever yours,

W. C.

LETTERS FROM EARTHAM

1792-1794

CCCII

To Mr. Samuel Teedon.

EARTHAM, NEAR CHICHESTER,
Aug. 5, 1792.

DEAR SIR,

This journey, of which we all had some fears, and I a thousand, has by the mercy of God been happily and well performed, and we have met with no terrors by the way. I indeed myself was a little daunted by the tremendous height of the Sussex hills, in comparison of which all that I had seen elsewhere are dwarfs: but I only was alarmed; Mrs. Unwin had no such sensations, but was always cheerful from the beginning of our expedition to the end of it. At Barnet we found the inn so noisy that I was almost driven to despair by the dread that she would get no rest; but I was happily disappointed. She slept about four hours, and seemed as much refreshed as if she had slept twice as many. At Ripley we had a

silent inn, and rested well. The next day, but late, we arrived at Eartham; and now begin to feel ourselves, under the hospitable roof of our amiable friend, well requited for all the fatigue, the heat, and the clouds of dust that we endured in the journey.

I had one glimpse—at least I was willing to hope it was a glimpse—of heavenly light by the way; an answer I suppose to many fervent prayers of yours. Continue to pray for us, and when anything occurs worth communicating let us know it.

Mrs. Unwin is in charming spirits, to which the incomparable air and delightful scenes of Eartham have much contributed. But our thanks are always due to the Giver of all good for these and all his benefits; for without His blessing Paradise itself would not cheer the soul that knows him.

Adieu. I am yours, with many thanks for all your spiritual aids,

WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin sends her kind remembrances.

CCCIH

To the Rev. Mr. Greatheed.

EARTHAM, Aug. 6, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,

Having first thanked you for your affectionate and acceptable letter, I will proceed, as well as I can, to answer your equally affectionate request that I would

send you early news of our arrival at Eartham. Here we are in the most elegant mansion that I have ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure grounds that I have ever seen; but which, dissipated as my powers of thought are at present, I will not undertake to describe. It shall suffice me to say that they occupy three sides of a hill, which in Buckinghamshire might well pass for a mountain, and from the summit of which is beheld a most magnificent landscape bounded by the sea, and in one part of it by the Isle of Wight, which may also be seen plainly from the window of the library in which I am writing.

It pleased God to carry us both through the journey with far less difficulty and inconvenience than I expected. I began it indeed with a thousand fears, and when we arrived the first evening at Barnet, found myself oppressed in spirit to a degree that could hardly be exceeded. I saw Mrs. Unwin weary, as she might well be, and heard such a variety of noises, both within the house and without, that I concluded she would get no rest. But I was mercifully disappointed. She rested, though not well, yet sufficiently; and when we finished our next day's journey at Ripley, we were both in better condition, both of body and mind, than on the day preceding. At Ripley we found a quiet inn, that housed, as it happened, that night, no company but ourselves. There we slept well, and rose perfectly refreshed. And except some terrors that I felt at passing over

the Sussex hills by moonlight, met with little to complain of till we arrived about ten o'clock at Eartham. Here we are as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us. It is almost a Paradise in which we dwell; and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive. Our host mentions you with great respect, and bids me tell you that he esteems you highly. Mrs. Unwin, who is, I think, in some points, already the better for her excursion, unites with mine her best compliments both to yourself and Mrs. Greatheed. I have much to see and enjoy before I can be perfectly apprised of all the delights of Eartham, and will therefore now subscribe myself, yours, my dear Sir, with great sincerity,

W. C

CCCIV

To Mrs. Courtenay.

EARTHAM, Aug. 12, 1792.

MY DEAREST CATHARINA,

Though I have travelled far, nothing did I see in my travels that surprised me half so agreeably as your kind letter; for high as my opinion of your good nature is, I had no hopes of hearing from you till I should have written first;—a pleasure which I intended to allow myself the first opportunity.

After three days confinement in a coach, and suffer-

ing as we went all that could be suffered from excessive heat and dust, we found ourselves late in the evening at the door of our friend Hayley. In every other respect the journey was extremely pleasant. At the Mitre in Barnet, where we lodged the first evening, we found our friend Mr. Rose, who had walked thither from his house in Chancery Lane to meet us ; and at Kingston, where we dined the second day, I found my old and much valued friend General Cowper, whom I had not seen in thirty years, and but for this journey should never have seen again. Mrs. Unwin, on whose account I had a thousand fears before we set out, suffered as little from fatigue as myself, and begins I hope already to feel some beneficial effects from the air of Eartham, and the exercise that she takes in one of the most delightful pleasure-grounds in the world. They occupy three sides of a hill, lofty enough to command a view of the sea, which skirts the horizon to a length of many miles, with the Isle of Wight at the end of it. The inland scene is equally beautiful, consisting of a large and deep valley well cultivated, and enclosed by magnificent hills, all crowned with wood. I had, for my part, no conception that a poet could be the owner of such a Paradise ; and his house is as elegant as his scenes are charming.

But think not, my dear Catharina, that amidst all these beauties I shall lose the remembrance of the peaceful, but less splendid Weston. Your precincts will be as dear to me as ever, when I return ; though when that day will arrive I know not, our host being

determined, as I plainly see, to keep us as long as possible. Give my best love to your husband. Thank him most kindly for his attention to the old bard of Greece, and pardon me that I do not send you now an epitaph for Fop. I am not sufficiently recollected to compose even a bagatelle at present ; but in due time you shall receive it.

Hayley, who will some time or other, I hope, see you at Weston, is already prepared to love you both, and being passionately fond of music, longs much to hear you.—Adieu !

W. C.

CCCV

To the Rev. John Newton.

EARTHAM, Aug. 16, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I must be shorter than I would be, and must scribble as fast as I can, being wanted by Romney, who is here, and to whom I am sitting for my picture.

Our journey, as I believe I told you in my last, was not undertaken without prayer, or without some reasonable ground of hope that God would prosper it. It has accordingly prospered hitherto, and was performed on Mrs. Unwin's part with much less fatigue than I expected. The first day's labours seemed to affect her most ; for when we arrived at Barnet, where Mr. Rose met us, having walked thither for that purpose, her voice failed through weariness, and she

could scarce articulate ; but the next day's journey to Ripley she performed with much greater ease ; and when we reached Eartham, on the evening of the third day, was as well and seemed almost as fresh as when we set out. Thus it has pleased God to answer our prayers for a safe conveyance hither, and I have a hope that he will farther answer them, by making the air of this place, and the beautiful scenery of it, conducive to the renewal both of her health and spirits, and of mine. It is certain that we could hardly have travelled to a more delightful scene, or to a purer air. The garden, or rather pleasure-ground, is on a hill ; the summit of which commands an extensive view of the sea, at nine miles distance, and of the Isle of Wight ; and in a bower on that summit Mrs. Unwin and I were sitting when Samuel brought me your welcome letter. I thank you for it, and for your verses enclosed in it. Natural as they are, and free from all affectation of finery, we found them very affecting, and so did my friend Hayley afterward, to whom I lent them for his perusal.

Here Mrs. Unwin walks more than she did or could be persuaded to do at Weston ; the cheerfulness naturally inspired by agreeable novelty, I suppose, is that which enables her to do it ; and when she is weary she gets into a chaise drawn by Socket and little Hayley, and pushed behind either by me or my cousin Johnson ; the motion of which differs indeed from that of walking, but on a rough gravel, such as this country affords, is hardly less beneficial.

Perhaps when I write again I shall be less hurried, though every day is crowded with employment. At present I can only add my best love and Mrs. Unwin's together, with Johnny's best compliments to yourself and Miss Catlett, and that I am, my dear friend,

most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCCVI

To Lady Hesketh.

EARTHAM, Aug. 26, 1792.

I know not how it is, my dearest coz, but in a new scene, and surrounded by strange objects, I find my powers of thinking dissipated to a degree that makes it difficult to me even to write a letter, and even a letter to you; but such a letter as I can, I will, and have the fairest chance to succeed this morning, Hayley, Romney, Hayley's son, and Beau, being all gone together to the sea for bathing. The sea, you must know, is nine miles off, so that unless stupidity prevent, I shall have opportunity to write not only to you, but to poor Hurdis also, who is broken-hearted for the loss of his favourite sister, lately dead: and whose letter, giving an account of it, which I received yesterday, drew tears from the eyes of all our party. My only comfort respecting even yourself is, that you write in good spirits, and assure me that you are in a state of recovery; otherwise I should mourn not

only for Hurdis, but for myself, lest a certain event should reduce me, and in a short time too, to a situation as distressing as his; for though nature designed you only for my cousin, you have had a sister's place in my affections ever since I knew you. The reason is, I suppose, that having no sister, the daughter of my own mother, I thought it proper to have one, the daughter of yours. Certain it is, that I can by no means afford to lose you; and that unless you will be upon honour with me, to give me always a true account of yourself, at least when we are not together, I shall always be unhappy, because always suspicious that you deceive me.

Now for ourselves. I am, without the least dissimulation, in good health; my spirits are about as good as you have ever seen them; and if increase of appetite and a double portion of sleep be advantageous, such are the advantages that I have received from this migration. As to that gloominess of mind, which I have had these twenty years, it cleaves to me even here; and could I be translated to Paradise, unless I left my body behind me, would cleave to me even there also. It is my companion for life, and nothing will ever divorce us. So much for myself. Mrs. Unwin is evidently the better for her jaunt, though by no means as she was before this last attack; still wanting help when she would rise from her seat, and a support in walking; but she is able to use more exercise than she could at home, and moves with rather a less tottering step. God

knows what he designs for me ; but when I see those who are dearer to me than myself distempered and enfeebled, and myself as strong as in the days of my youth, I tremble for the solitude in which a few years may place me. I wish her and you to die before me indeed, but not till I am more likely to follow immediately. Enough of this !

Romney has drawn me in crayons, and in the opinion of all here with his best hand, and with the most exact resemblance possible.

The 17th of September is the day on which I intend to leave Earham. We shall then have been six weeks resident here ; a holiday time long enough for a man who has much to do. And now farewell !

W. C.

P.S.—Hayley, whose love for me seems to be truly that of a brother, has given me his picture, drawn by Romney about fifteen years ago ;—an admirable likeness.

CCCVII

To Lady Hesketh.

EARTHAM, *Sept. 9, 1792.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

I determine, if possible, to send you one more letter, or at least, if possible, once more to send you something like one, before we leave Earham. But I am in truth so unaccountably local in the use of my

pen, that, like the man in the fable, who could leap well no where but at Rhodes, I seem incapable of writing at all, except at Weston. This is, as I have already told you, a delightful place; more beautiful scenery I have never beheld nor expect to behold; but the charms of it, uncommon as they are, have not in the least alienated my affections from Weston. The genius of that place suits me better,—it has an air of snug concealment, in which a disposition like mine feels itself peculiarly gratified; whereas here I see from every window woods like forests, and hills like mountains,—a wilderness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little. Accordingly, I have not looked out for a house in Sussex, nor shall.

The intended day of our departure continues to be the 17th. I hope to reconduct Mrs. Unwin to the Lodge with her health considerably mended: but it is in the article of speech chiefly, and in her powers of walking, that she is sensible of much improvement. Her sight and her hand still fail her, so that she can neither read nor work; mortifying circumstances both to her, who is never willingly idle.

On the 18th I purpose to dine with the General, and to rest that night at Kingston; but the pleasure I shall have in the interview will hardly be greater than the pain I shall feel at the end of it, for we shall part probably to meet no more.

Johnny, I know, has told you that Mr. Hurdis is here. Distressed by the loss of his sister, he has renounced the place where she died for ever, and is about to enter on a new course of life at Oxford. You would admire him much. He is gentle in his manners, and delicate in his person, resembling our poor friend Unwin, both in face and figure, more than any one I have ever seen. But he has not, at least he has not at present, his vivacity.

I have corresponded since I came here with Mrs. Courtenay, and had yesterday a very kind letter from her.

Adieu, my dear ; may God bless you. Write to me as soon as you can after the 20th. I shall then be at Weston, and indulging myself in the hope that I shall ere long see you there also.

W. C.

CCCVIII

To Mrs. Courtenay, Weston Underwood.

EARTHAM, Sept. 10, 1792.

MY DEAR CATHARINA,

I am not so uncourteous a knight as to leave your last kind letter, and the last I hope that I shall receive for a long time to come, without an attempt, at least, to acknowledge and to send you something in the shape of an answer to it ; but having been obliged to dose myself last night with laudanum, on account

of a little nervous fever, to which I am always subject, and for which I find it the best remedy, I feel myself this morning particularly under the influence of Lethean vapours, and, consequently, in danger of being uncommonly stupid!

You could hardly have sent me intelligence that would have gratified me more than that of my two dear friends, Sir John and Lady Throckmorton, having departed from Paris two days before the terrible 10th of August.¹ I have had many anxious thoughts on their account; and am truly happy to learn that they have sought a more peaceful region, while it was yet permitted them to do so. They will not, I trust, revisit those scenes of tumult and horror while they shall continue to merit that description. We are here all of one mind respecting the cause in which the Parisians are engaged; wish them a free people, and as happy as they can wish themselves. But their conduct has not always pleased us: we are shocked at their sanguinary proceedings, and begin to fear, myself in particular, that they will prove themselves unworthy, because incapable of enjoying it, of the inestimable blessings of liberty. My daily toast is, Sobriety and Freedom to the French; for they seem as destitute of the former, as they are eager to secure the latter.

¹ While Cowper was spending these peaceful happy days with his friends at Eartham, some of the most dreadful scenes in the French Revolution were being enacted at Paris. On 10th August the Tuileries were stormed, the Swiss Guard massacred, and the King and Queen made prisoners; and only a few days before he wrote this letter the September massacres took place.

We still hold our purpose of leaving Eartham on the 17th; and again my fears on Mrs. Unwin's account begin to trouble me; but they are now not quite so reasonable as in the first instance. If she could bear the fatigue of travelling then, she is more equal to it at present; and supposing that nothing happens to alarm her, which is very probable, may be expected to reach Weston in much better condition than when she left it. Her improvement, however, is chiefly in her looks, and in the articles of speaking and walking; for she can neither rise from her chair without help, nor walk without a support; nor read, nor use her needles.¹ Give my love to the good Doctor, and make him acquainted with the state of his patient, since he, of all men, seems to have the best right to know it.

I am proud that you are pleased with the Epitaph I sent you, and shall be still prouder to see it perpetuated by the chisel. It is all that I have done since here I came, and all that I have been able to do. I wished, indeed, to have requited Romney for his well-drawn copy of me, in rhyme; and have more than once or twice attempted it: but I find, like the

¹ The needles were not to be used by Mrs. Unwin again.

“Thy needles, once a shining store,
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shine no more,
My Mary!

“But well thou play'dst the housewife's part,
And all thy threads with magic art
Have wound themselves about this heart,
My Mary!”

man in the fable, who could leap only at Rhodes, that verse is almost impossible to me except at Weston.—Tell my friend George that I am every day mindful of him, and always love him; and bid him by no means to vex himself about the tardiness of Andrews. Remember me affectionately to William, and to Pitcairn, whom I shall hope to find with you at my return; and should you see Mr. Buchanan, to him also.—I have now charged you with commissions enow, and having added Mrs. Unwin's best compliments and told you that I long to see you again, will conclude myself, my dear Catharina, most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCCIX

To William Hayley, Esq.

THE SUN, AT KINGSTON,
Sept. 18, 1792.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

With no sinister accident to retard or terrify us, we find ourselves, at a quarter before one, arrived safe at Kingston. I left you with a heavy heart, and with a heavy heart took leave of our dear Tom, at the bottom of the chalk-hill. But soon after this last separation, my troubles gushed from my eyes, and then I was better.

We must now prepare for our visit to the General. I add no more, therefore, than our dearest remem-

brances and prayers that God may bless you and yours, and reward you an hundredfold for all your kindness. Tell Tom I shall always hold him dear for his affectionate attentions to Mrs. Unwin. From her heart the memory of him can never be erased. Johnny loves you all, and has his share in all these acknowledgments.—Adieu!

W. C.

LETTERS FROM WESTON UNDER-
WOOD

1792-1794

CCCX

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, *Sept.* 21, 1792.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,

Chaos himself, even the chaos of Milton, is not surrounded with more confusion, nor has a mind more completely in a hubbub, than I experience at the present moment. At our first arrival, after long absence, we find an hundred orders to servants necessary, a thousand things to be restored to their proper places, and an endless variety of minutiae to be adjusted; which, though individually of little importance, are most momentous in the aggregate. In these circumstances I find myself so indisposed to writing, that save to yourself I would on no account attempt it; but to you I will give such a recital as I can of all that has passed since I sent you that short note

from Kingston, knowing that if it be a perplexed recital, you will consider the cause, and pardon it. I will begin with a remark, in which I am inclined to think you will agree with me, that there is sometimes more true heroism passing in a corner, and on occasions that make no noise in the world, than has often been exercised by those whom that world esteems her greatest heroes, and on occasions the most illustrious; I hope so at least; for all the heroism I have to boast, and all the opportunities I have of displaying any, are of a private nature. After writing the note I immediately began to prepare for my appointed visit to Ham; but the struggles that I had with my own spirit, labouring as I did under the most dreadful dejection, are never to be told. I would have given the world to have been excused. I went, however, and carried my point against myself with a heart riven asunder. I have reasons for all this anxiety, which I cannot relate now. The visit, however, passed off well, and we returned in the dark to Kingston,—I with a lighter heart than I had known since my departure from Eartham,—and Mary too, for she had suffered hardly less than myself, and chiefly on my account. That night we rested well in our inn, and at twenty minutes after eight next morning set off for London; exactly at ten we reached Mr. Rose's door; we drank a dish of chocolate with him, and proceeded, Mr. Rose riding with us as far as St. Alban's. From this time we met with no impediment. In the dark, and in a storm, at

eight at night, we found ourselves at our own back door. Mrs. Unwin was very near slipping out of the chair in which she was taken from the chaise, but at last was landed safe. We all have had a good night, and are all well this morning.

[God bless you, my dearest brother.

W. C.

CCCXI

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, Oct. 2, 1792.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,

A bad night, succeeded by an east wind, and a sky all in sables, have such an effect on my spirits, that if I did not consult my own comfort more than yours, I should not write to-day, for I shall not entertain you much; yet your letter, though containing no very pleasant tidings, has afforded me some relief. It tells me, indeed, that you have been dispirited yourself, and that poor little Tom, the faithful squire of my Mary, has been seriously indisposed: all this grieves me; but then there is a warmth of heart and a kindness in it, that do me good. I will endeavour not to repay you in notes of sorrow and despondence, though all my sprightly chords seem broken. In truth, one day excepted, I have not seen the day when I have been cheerful, since I left you. My spirits, I think, are almost constantly lower than they were; the approach of

winter is perhaps the cause; and if it is, I have nothing better to expect for a long time to come.

Yesterday was a day of assignation with myself, the day of which I said some days before it came when that day comes I will begin my dissertations. Accordingly when it came I prepared to do so; filled a letter-case with fresh paper, furnished myself with a pretty good pen, and replenished my ink-bottle; but partly from one cause, and partly from another, chiefly however from distress and dejection, after writing and obliterating about six lines, in the composition of which I spent near an hour, I was obliged to relinquish the attempt. An attempt so unsuccessful could have no other effect than to dishearten me; and it has had that effect to such a degree that I know not when I shall find courage to make another. At present I shall certainly abstain, since at present I cannot well afford to expose myself to the danger of a fresh mortification.

W. C.

CCCXII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, Nov. 9, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I wish that I were as industrious, and as much occupied as you, though in a different way; but it is not so with me. Mrs. Unwin's great debility, (who is

not yet able to move without assistance,) is of itself a hinderance such as would effectually disable me. Till she can work and read, and fill up her time as usual, (all which is at present entirely out of her power,) I may now and then find time to write a letter, but I shall write nothing more. I cannot sit with my pen in my hand, and my books before me, while she is in effect in solitude, silent, and looking at the fire. To this hinderance that other has been added, of which you are already aware,—a want of spirits, such as I have never known, when I was not absolutely laid by, since I commenced an author. How long I shall be continued in these uncomfortable circumstances is known only to Him who, as he will, disposes of us all. I may be yet able perhaps to prepare the first book of the *Paradise Lost* for the press, before it will be wanted ; and Johnson himself seems to think there will be no haste for the second. But poetry is my favourite employment, and all my poetical operations are in the mean time suspended ; for while a work to which I have bound myself remains unaccomplished I can do nothing else.

Johnson's plan of prefixing my phiz to the new edition of my *Poems* is by no means a pleasant one to me, and so I told him in a letter I sent him from Earham, in which I assured him that my objections to it would not be easily surmounted. But if you judge that it may really have an effect in advancing the sale, I would not be so squeamish as to suffer the spirit of prudery to prevail in me to his disadvantage.

Somebody told an author, I forget whom, that there was more vanity in refusing his picture, than in granting it; on which he instantly complied. I do not perfectly feel all the force of the argument, but it shall content me that he did.

I do most sincerely rejoice in the success of your publication, and have no doubt that my prophecy concerning your success in greater matters will be fulfilled. We are naturally pleased when our friends approve what we approve ourselves; how much then must I be pleased, when you speak so kindly of Johnny! I know him to be all that you think him, and love him entirely.

Adieu! We expect you at Christmas, and shall therefore rejoice when Christmas comes. Let nothing interfere.—Ever yours,

W. C.

CCCXIII

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, Nov. 25, 1792.

How shall I thank you enough for the interest you take in my future Miltonic labours, and the assistance you promise me in the performance of them? I will some time or other, if I live, and live a poet, acknowledge your friendship in some of my best verse; the most suitable return one poet can make to another; in the mean time, I love you, and

am sensible of all your kindness. You wish me warm in my work, and I ardently wish the same; but when I shall be so, God only knows. My melancholy, which seemed a little alleviated for a few days, has gathered about me again, with as black a cloud as ever; the consequence is absolute incapacity to begin.

I was for some years dirge writer to the town of Northampton, being employed by the clerk of the principal parish there, to furnish him with an annual copy of verses proper to be printed at the foot of his bill of mortality; but the clerk died, and hearing nothing for two years from his successor, I well hoped that I was out of my office. The other morning, however, Sam announced the new clerk; he came to solicit the same service as I had rendered his predecessor, and I reluctantly complied; doubtful, indeed, whether I was capable. I have however achieved that labour, and I have done nothing more. I am just sent for up to Mary, dear Mary! Adieu! she is as well as when I left you, I would I could say better. Remember us both affectionately to your sweet boy, and trust me for being most truly yours,

W. C.

CCCXIV

*To Lady Hesketh.**Dec. 1, 1792.*

I am truly glad, my dearest coz, that the waters of Cheltenham have done thee good, and wish ardently that those of Bath may establish thy health, and prove the means of prolonging it many years, even till thou shalt become what thou wast called at a very early age, an old wench indeed. I have been a *pauvre miserable* ever since I came from Eartham, and was little better while there, so that whatever motive may incline me to travel again hereafter, it will not be the hope that my spirits will be much the better for it. Neither was Mrs. Unwin's health so much improved by that frisk of ours into Sussex, as I had hoped and expected. She is, however, tolerably well, but very far indeed from having recovered the effects of her last disorder.

My birthday (the sixty-first that I have numbered) has proved for once a propitious day to me, for on that day my spirits began to mend, my nights became less hideous, and my days have been such of course.

I have heard nothing from Joseph,¹ and having been always used to hear from him in November, am reduced to the dire necessity of supposing with you that he is heinously offended. Being in want of money, however, I wrote to him yesterday, and a letter which ought to produce a friendly answer; but whether it

¹ Joseph Hill.

will or not is an affair, at present, of great uncertainty. Walter Bagot is offended too, and wonders that I would have any connexion with so bad a man as the author of the *Essay on Old Maids* must necessarily be! Poor man! he has five sisters, I think, in that predicament, which makes *his* resentment rather excusable. Joseph, by the way, has two, and perhaps may be proportionally influenced by that consideration. Should that be the case, I have nothing left to do but to wish them all good husbands, since the reconciliation of my two friends seems closely connected with that contingency.

In making the first advances to your sister you have acted like yourself, that is to say like a good and affectionate sister, and will not, I hope, lose your reward. Rewarded in another world you will be, no doubt, but I should hope that you will be not altogether unrecompensed in this. Thou hast a heart, I know, that cannot endure to be long at enmity with any one, and were I capable of using thee never so ill, I am sure that in time you would sue to me for a pardon. Thou dost not want fire, but meekness is predominant in thee.

I was never so idle in my life, and never had so much to do. God knows when this will end, but I think of bestirring myself soon, and of putting on my Miltonic trammels once again. That once done, I shall not, I hope, put them off till the work is finished. I have written nothing lately but a sonnet to Romney, and a mortuary copy of verses for the town of

Northampton, having been applied to by the new clerk for that purpose.

Johnson designs handsomely; you must pardon Johnson, and receive him into your best graces. He purposes to publish, together with my Homer, a new edition of my two volumes of *Poems*, and to make me a present of the entire profits. They are to be handsome quartos, with an engraving of Abbott's picture of me prefixed. I have left myself neither time nor room for politics.

The French are a vain and childish people, and conduct themselves on this grand occasion with a levity and extravagance nearly akin to madness; but it would have been better for Austria and Prussia to let them alone. All nations have a right to choose their own mode of government, and the sovereignty of the people is a doctrine that evinces itself; for whenever the people choose to be masters they always are so, and none can hinder them. God grant that we may have no revolution here, but unless we have a reform, we certainly shall. Depend upon it, my dear, the hour is come when power founded in patronage and corrupt majorities must govern this land no longer. Concessions too must be made to dissenters of every denomination. They have a right to them, a right to all the privileges of Englishmen, and sooner or later, by fair means or by force, they will have them.

Adieu, my dearest coz, I have only time to add Mrs. U.'s most affectionate remembrances, and to conclude myself ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

Mr. and Mrs. Rose come on the twenty-second, and Johnny with them; the former to stay ten days. It is strange that any body should suspect Mrs. Smith of having been assisted by me. None writes more rapidly or more correctly—twenty pages in a morning, which I have often read and heard read at night, and found not a word to alter. This moment comes a very kind letter from Joseph. Sephus tells me I may expect to see very soon the strongest assurances from the people of property, of every description, to support the King and present constitution. In this I do most sincerely rejoice as you will. He wishes to know my political opinions, and he shall most truly.

CCCXV

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, *Jan. 20, 1793.*

MY DEAR BROTHER,

Now I know that you are safe, I treat you, as you see, with a philosophical indifference, not acknowledging your kind and immediate answer to anxious inquiries, till it suits my own convenience. I have learned however from my late solicitude, that not only you, but yours, interest me to a degree that, should any thing happen to either of you, would be very inconsistent with my peace. Sometimes I thought that you were extremely ill, and once or twice, that you were dead. As often some tragedy reached my ear

concerning little Tom. "*O, vane mentes hominum!*" How liable are we to a thousand impositions, and how indebted to honest old Time, who never fails to undeceive us! Whatever you had in prospect you acted kindly by me not to make me partaker of your expectations, for I have a spirit, if not so sanguine as yours, yet that would have waited for your coming with anxious impatience, and have been dismally mortified by the disappointment. Had you come, and come without notice too, you would not have surprised us more, than (as the matter was managed) we were surprised at the arrival of your picture. It reached us in the evening, after the shutters were closed, at a time when a chaise might actually have brought you without giving us the least previous intimation. Then it was, that Samuel, with his cheerful countenance, appeared at the study door, and with a voice as cheerful as his looks, exclaimed, "Mr. Hayley is come, Madam!" We both started, and in the same moment cried, "Mr. Hayley come! and where is he?" The next moment corrected our mistake, and finding Mary's voice grow suddenly tremulous, I turned and saw her weeping.

I do nothing, notwithstanding all your exhortations: my idleness is a proof against them all, or to speak more truly my difficulties are so. Something indeed I do. I play at pushpin with Homer every morning before breakfast, fingering and polishing, as Paris did his armour. I have lately had a letter from Dublin on that subject, which has pleased me.

W. C.

CCCXVI

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, Jan. 29, 1793.

MY DEAREST HAYLEY,

I truly sympathize with you under your weight of sorrow for the loss of our good Samaritan. But be not brokenhearted, my friend ! Remember, the loss of those we love is the condition on which we live ourselves ; and that he who chooses his friends wisely from among the excellent of the earth, has a sure ground to hope concerning them when they die, that a merciful God has made them far happier than they could be here, and that we shall join them soon again. This is solid comfort, could we but avail ourselves of it ; but I confess the difficulty of doing so. Sorrow is like the deaf adder, "that hears not the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely" ; and I feel so much myself for the death of Austin, that my own chief consolation is, that I had never seen him. Live yourself, I beseech you, for I have seen so much of you, that I can by no means spare you, and I will live as long as it shall please God to permit. I know you set some value on me, therefore let that promise comfort you, and give us not reason to say, like David's servant, "We know that it would have pleased thee more if all we had died, than this one, for whom thou art inconsolable." You have still Romney, and Carwardine, and Guy,

and me, my poor Mary, and I know not how many beside ; as many, I suppose, as ever had an opportunity of spending a day with you. He who has the most friends must necessarily lose the most, and he whose friends are numerous as yours, may the better spare a part of them. It is a changing transient scene : yet a little while, and this poor dream of life will be over with all of us.—The living, and they who live unhappy, they are indeed subjects of sorrow. Adieu ! my beloved friend.—Ever yours,

W. C.

CCCXVII

To John Johnson, Esq.

Jan. 31, 1793.

Io Pæan !

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,

Even as you foretold, so it came to pass. On Tuesday I received your letter, and on Tuesday came the pheasants ; for which I am indebted in many thanks, as well as Mrs. Unwin, both to your kindness and to your kind friend Mr. Copeman.

In Copeman's ear this truth let Echo tell—

“ Immortal bards like mortal pheasants well : ”

And when his clerkship's out, I wish him herds

Of golden clients for his golden birds.

Our friends the Courtenays have never dined with us since their marriage, *because* we have never asked them ; and we have never asked them, *because* poor Mrs. Unwin is not so equal to the task of providing

for and entertaining company as before this last illness. But this is no objection to the arrival here of a bustard ; rather it is a cause for which we shall be particularly glad to see the monster. It will be a handsome present to *them*. So let the bustard come, as the Lord Mayor of London said to the hare, when he was hunting,—let her come, a' God's name : I am not afraid of her.

Adieu, my dear cousin and caterer. My eyes terribly bad ; else I had much more to say to you.—
Ever affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXVIII

To Lady Hesketh.

Feb. 10, 1793.

My pens are all split and my inkglass is dry ;
Neither wit, common sense, nor ideas have I.

In vain has it been that I have made several attempts to write, since I came from Sussex ; unless more comfortable days arrive than I have the confidence to look for, there is an end of all writing with me. I have no spirits :—when the Rose came, I was obliged to prepare for his coming by a nightly dose of laudanum—twelve drops suffice ; but without them, I am devoured by melancholy.

A-propos of the Rose ! His wife in her political notions is the exact counterpart of yourself—loyal in the extreme. Therefore, if you find her thus inclined,

when you become acquainted with her, you must not place her resemblance of yourself to the account of her admiration of you, for she is your likeness ready made. In fact, we are all of one mind, about government matters, and notwithstanding your opinion, the Rose is himself a Whig, and I am a Whig, and you, my dear, are a Tory, and all the Tories now-a-days call all the Whigs Republicans. How the deuce you came to be a Tory is best known to yourself; you have to answer for this novelty to the shades of your ancestors, who were always Whigs ever since we had any.—Adieu!

W. C.

CCCXIX

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Feb. 17, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have read the critique of my work in the *Analytical Review*, and am happy to have fallen into the hands of a critic, rigorous enough indeed, but a scholar, and a man of sense, and who does not deliberately intend me mischief. I am better pleased indeed that he censures some things, than I should have been with unmixed commendation, for his censure will (to use the new diplomatic term) accredit his praises. In his particular remarks he is for the most part right, and I shall be the better for them; but in his general ones I think he asserts too largely, and more than he could

prove. With respect to inversions in particular, I know that they do not abound. Once they did, and I had Milton's example for it, not disapproved by Addison. But on ———'s remonstrance against them, I expunged the most, and in my new edition shall have fewer still. I know that they give dignity, and am sorry to part with them ; but, to parody an old proverb, he who lives in the year ninety-three, must do as in the year ninety-three is done by others. The same remark I have to make on his censure of inharmonious lines. I know them to be much fewer than he asserts, and not more in number than I accounted indispensably necessary to a due variation of cadence. I have, however, now in conformity with modern taste (overmuch delicate in my mind) given to a far greater number of them a flow as smooth as oil. A few I retain, and will, in compliment to my own judgement. He thinks me too faithful to compound epithets in the introductory lines, and I know his reason. He fears lest the English reader should blame Homer, whom he idolizes, though hardly more than I, for such constant repetition. But them I shall not alter. They are necessary to a just representation of the original. In the affair of Outis, I shall throw him flat on his back by an unanswerable argument, which I shall give in a note, and with which I am furnished by Mrs. Unwin. So much for hypercriticism, which has run away with all my paper. This critic by the way is ———, I know him by infallible indications.

W. C.

CCCXX

To the Rev. Mr. Hurdis.

WESTON, Feb. 23, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

My eyes, which have long been inflamed, will hardly serve me for Homer, and oblige me to make all my letters short. You have obliged me much, by sending me so speedily the remainder of your notes. I have begun with them again, and find them, as before, very much to the purpose. More to the purpose they could not have been, had you been Poetry Professor already. I rejoice sincerely in the prospect you have of that office, which, whatever may be your own thoughts of the matter, I am sure you will fill with great sufficiency. Would that my interest and power to serve you were greater ! One string to my bow I have, and one only, which shall not be idle for want of my exertions. I thank you likewise for your very entertaining notices and remarks in the natural way. The hurry in which I write would not suffer me to send you many in return, had I many to send, but only two or three present themselves.

Frogs will feed on worms. I saw a frog gathering into his gullet an earth-worm as long as himself ; it cost him time and labour, but at last he succeeded.

Mrs. Unwin and I, crossing a brook, saw from the foot-bridge somewhat at the bottom of the water which had the appearance of a flower. Observing it

attentively, we found that it consisted of a circular assemblage of minnows; their heads all met in a centre; and their tails diverging at equal distances, and being elevated above their heads, gave them the appearance of a flower half-blown. One was longer than the rest; and as often as a straggler came in sight, he quitted his place to pursue him, and having driven him away, he returned to it again, no other minnow offering to take it in his absence. This we saw him do several times. The object that had attached them all was a dead minnow, which they seemed to be devouring.

After a very rainy day, I saw on one of the flower borders what seemed a long hair, but it had a waving, twining motion. Considering more nearly, I found it alive, and endued with spontaneity, but could not discover at the ends of it either head or tail, or any distinction of parts. I carried it into the house, when the air of a warm room dried and killed it presently.

W. C.

CCCXXI

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, *Feb.* 24, 1793.

Your letter (so full of kindness, and so exactly in unison with my own feelings for you) should have had, as it deserved to have, an earlier answer, had I not been perpetually tormented with inflamed eyes, which

are a sad hinderance to me in every thing. But to make amends, if I do not send you an early answer, I send you at least a speedy one, being obliged to write as fast as my pen can trot, that I may shorten the time of poring upon paper as much as possible. Homer too has been another hinderance, for always when I can see, which is only about two hours every morning, and not at all by candlelight, I devote myself to him, being in haste to send him a second time to the press, that nothing may stand in the way of Milton. By the way, where are my dear Tom's remarks, which I long to have, and must have soon, or they will come too late?

Oh! you rogue! what would you give to have such a dream about Milton, as I had about a week since? I dreamed that being in a house in the city, and with much company, looking towards the lower end of the room from the upper end of it, I descried a figure which I immediately knew to be Milton's. He was very gravely, but very neatly attired in the fashion of his day, and had a countenance which filled me with those feelings that an affectionate child has for a beloved father, such, for instance, as Tom has for you. My first thought was wonder, where he could have been concealed so many years; my second, a transport of joy to find him still alive; my third, another transport to find myself in his company; and my fourth, a resolution to accost him. I did so, and he received me with a complacence, in which I saw equal sweetness and dignity. I spoke of his *Paradise*

Lost, as every man must, who is worthy to speak of it at all, and told him a long story of the manner in which it affected me, when I first discovered it, being at that time a schoolboy. He answered me by a smile and a gentle inclination of his head. He then grasped my hand affectionately, and with a smile that charmed me, said, "Well, you for your part will do well also;" at last recollecting his great age, (for I understood him to be two hundred years old,) I feared that I might fatigue him by much talking, I took my leave, and he took his, with an air of the most perfect good breeding. His person, his features, his manner, were all so perfectly characteristic, that I am persuaded an apparition of him could not represent him more completely. This may be said to have been one of the dreams of Pindus, may it not?

How truly I rejoice that you have recovered Guy; that man won my heart the moment I saw him; give my love to him, and tell him I am truly glad he is alive again.

There is much sweetness in those lines from the sonneteer of Avon, and not a little in dear Tom's,—an earnest, I trust, of good things to come.

With Mary's kind love, I must now conclude myself, my dear brother, ever yours,

LIPPUS.

CCCXXII

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, March 19. 1793.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,

I am so busy every morning before breakfast, (my only opportunity,) strutting and stalking in Homeric stilts, that you ought to account it an instance of marvellous grace and favour, that I condescend to write even to you. Sometimes I am seriously almost crazed with the multiplicity of the matters before me, and the little or no time that I have for them; and sometimes I repose myself after the fatigue of that distraction on the pillow of despair; a pillow which has often served me in time of need, and is become, by frequent use, if not very comfortable, at least convenient. So reposed, I laugh at the world, and say, "Yes, you may gape and expect both Homer and Milton from me, but I'll be hanged if ever you get them."

In Homer you must know I am advanced as far as the fifteenth book of the *Iliad*, leaving nothing behind me that can reasonably offend the most fastidious; and I design him for public appearance in his new dress as soon as possible, for a reason which any poet may guess, if heⁿ_s will but thrust his hand into his pocket.

You forbid me to tantalize you with an invitation to Weston, and yet invite me to Eartham!—No! no!

there is no such happiness in store for me at present. Had I rambled at all, I was under promise to all my dear mother's kindred to go to Norfolk, and they are dying to see me ; but I have told them, that die they must, for I cannot go ; and ergo as you will perceive can go no where else.

Thanks for Mazarine's epitaph ! it is full of witty paradox, and is written with a force and severity which sufficiently bespeak the author. I account it an inestimable curiosity, and shall be happy when time shall serve, with your aid, to make a good translation of it. But that will be a stubborn business. Adieu ! The clock strikes eight ; and now for Homer.

W. C.

CCCXXIII

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

March 29, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Your tidings concerning the slender pittance yet to come, are, as you observe, of the melancholy cast. Not being gifted by nature with the means of acquiring much, it is well, however, that she has given me a disposition to be contented with little. I have now been so many years habituated to small matters, that I should probably find myself incommoded by greater ; and may I but be enabled to shift, as I have been hitherto, unsatisfied wishes will never trouble me

much. My pen has helped me somewhat ; and, after some years' toil, I begin to reap the benefit. Had I begun sooner, perhaps I should have known fewer pecuniary distresses ; or, who can say ? It is possible that I might not have succeeded so well. Fruit ripens only a short time before it rots ; and man, in general, arrives not at maturity of mental powers at a much earlier period. I am now busied in preparing Homer for his second appearance. An author should consider himself as bound not to please himself, but the public ; and so far as the good pleasure of the public may be learned from the critics, I design to accommodate myself to it. The Latinisms, though employed by Milton, and numbered by Addison among the arts and expedients by which he has given dignity to his style, I shall render into plain English ; the rougher lines, though my reason for using them has never been proved a bad one, so far as I know, I shall make perfectly smooth ; and shall give body and substance to all that is in any degree feeble and flimsy. And when I have done all this, and more, if the critics still grumble, I shall say the very deuce is in them. Yet, that they will grumble, I make no doubt ; for, unreasonable as it is to do so, they all require something better than Homer, and that something they will certainly never get from me.

As to the canal that is to be my neighbour, I hear little about it. The Courtenays of Weston have nothing to do with it, and I have no intercourse with Tyringham. When it is finished, the people of these

parts will have to carry their coals seven miles only, which now they bring from Northampton or Bedford, both at the distance of fifteen. But, as Balaam says, who shall live when these things are done? It is not for me, a sexagenarian already, to expect that I shall. The chief objection to canals in general seems to be, that, multiplying as they do, they are likely to swallow the coasting trade.

I cannot tell you the joy I feel at the disappointment of the French¹; pitiful mimics of Spartan and Roman virtue, without a grain of it in their whole character.—Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXIV

To John Johnson, Esq.

THE LODGE, *April 11, 1793.*

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,

The long muster-roll of my great and small ancestors I signed, and dated, and sent up to Mr. Blue-mantle, on Monday, according to your desire.

¹ After the execution of the King on the 21st of January 1793, England and Spain declared war on France. On the 18th of March the Republican army in Belgium under Dumouriez was defeated at Nerwinden and compelled to fall back. The fortunes of the war were followed with very different feelings by Wordsworth. He had lately resided in France and all his sympathies were with the French. In July 1793 he was in the Isle of Wight, while the English fleet at Spithead was preparing for sea: every day he saw the gallant ships, under the red-cross flag, floating on a glassy sea: every evening he heard, with sad foreboding, the boom of the sunset cannon; and when in the village church the congregation bent in prayer for victory, he could not join in the prayer. See *The Prelude*, book x.

Such a pompous affair, drawn out for my sake, reminds me of the old fable of the mountain in parturition, and a mouse the produce. Rest undisturbed, say I, their lordly, ducal, and royal dust ! Had they left me something handsome, I should have respected them more. But perhaps they did not know that such a one as I should have the honour to be numbered among their descendants ! Well ! I have a little bookseller that makes me some amends for their deficiency. He has made me a present ;—an act of liberality which I take every opportunity to blazon, as it well deserves. But you, I suppose, have learned it already from Mr. Rose.

Fear not, my man. You will acquit yourself very well, I dare say, both in standing for your degree, and when you have gained it. A little tremor, and a little shamefacedness in a stripling, like you, are recommendations rather than otherwise ; and so they ought to be, being symptoms of an ingenuous mind rather unfrequent in this age of brass.

What you say of your determined purpose, with God's help, to take up the Cross, and despise the shame, gives us both real pleasure. In our pedigree is found one at least who did it before you. Do you the like, and you will meet him in heaven, as sure as the Scripture is the word of God.

The quarrel that the world has with evangelic men and doctrines, they would have with a host of angels in the human form : for it is the quarrel of owls with sunshine ; of ignorance with divine illumination.

Adieu, my dear Johnny ! We shall expect you with earnest desire of your coming, and receive you with much delight.

W. C.

CCCXXV

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, *April 23, 1793.*

MY DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER,

Better late than never, and better a little than none at all ! Had I been at liberty to consult my inclinations, I would have answered your truly kind and affectionate letter immediately. But I am the busiest man alive : and when this epistle is dispatched, you will be the only one of my correspondents to whom I shall not be indebted. While I write this, my poor Mary sits mute, which I cannot well bear, and which, together with want of time to write much, will have a curtailing effect on my epistle.

My only studying time is still given to Homer, not to correction and amendment of him, (for that is all over,) but to writing notes. Johnson has expressed a wish for some, that the unlearned may be a little illuminated concerning classical story and the mythology of the ancients ; and his behaviour to me has been so liberal, that I can refuse him nothing. Poking into the old Greek commentators blinds me. But it is no matter ;—I am the more like Homer. —Ever yours, my dearest Hayley,

W. C.

CCCXXVI

To the Rev. Walter Bagot.

WESTON, May 4, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

While your sorrow for our common loss was fresh in your mind, I would not write, lest a letter on so distressing a subject should be too painful both to you and me ; and now that I seem to have reached a proper time for doing it, the multiplicity of my literary business will hardly afford me leisure. Both you and I have this comfort when deprived of those we love,—at our time of life we have every reason to believe that the deprivation cannot be long. Our sun is setting too ; and when the hour of rest arrives we shall rejoin your brother, and many whom we have tenderly loved, our forerunners into a better country.

I will say no more on a theme which it will be better perhaps to treat with brevity ; and because the introduction of any other might seem a transition too violent, I will only add that Mrs. Unwin and I are about as well as we at any time have been within the last year.—Truly yours,

W. C.

CCCXXVII

*To William Hayley, Esq.*WESTON, *May 21, 1793.*

MY DEAR BROTHER,

You must either think me extremely idle, or extremely busy, that I have made your last very kind letter wait so very long for an answer. The truth however is, that I am neither; but have had time enough to have scribbled to you, had I been able to scribble at all. To explain this riddle I must give you a short account of my proceedings.

I rise at six every morning, and fag till near eleven, when I breakfast. The consequence is, that I am so exhausted as not to be able to write, when the opportunity offers. You will say—"Breakfast before you work, and then your work will not fatigue you." I answer—"Perhaps I might, and your counsel would probably prove beneficial; but I cannot spare a moment for eating in the early part of the morning, having no other time for study." This uneasiness of which I complain is a proof that I am somewhat stricken in years; and there is no other cause by which I can account for it, since I go early to bed always between ten and eleven, and seldom fail to sleep well. Certain it is, ten years ago I could have done as much, and sixteen years ago did actually much more, without suffering fatigue, or any inconvenience from my labours. How insensibly old age

steals on, and how often it is actually arrived before we suspect it! Accident alone,—some occurrence that suggests a comparison of our former with our present selves, affords the discovery. Well! it is always good to be undeceived, especially on an article of such importance.

There has been a book lately published, entitled, *Man as he is*. I have heard a high character of it, as admirably written, and am informed that for that reason, and because it inculcates Whig principles, it is by many imputed to you. I contradicted this report, assuring my informant that had it been yours, I must have known it, for that you have bound yourself to make me your father-confessor on all such wicked occasions, and not to conceal from me even a murder, should you happen to commit one.

I will not trouble you, at present, to send me any more books with a view to my notes on Homer. I am not without hopes that Sir John Throckmorton, who is expected here from Venice in a short time, may bring me Villoison's edition of the *Odyssey*. He certainly will, if he found it published, and that alone will be *instar omnium*.

Adieu, my dearest brother! Give my love to Tom, and thank him for his book, of which I believe I need not have deprived him, intending that my readers shall detect the occult instruction contained in Homer's stories for themselves.

W. C.

CCCXXVIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.**June 12, 1793.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You promise to be contented with a short line, and a short one you must have, hurried over in the little interval I have happened to find between the conclusion of my morning task and breakfast. Study has this good effect at least: it makes me an early riser, who might otherwise, perhaps, be as much given to dozing as my readers.

The scanty opportunity I have, I shall employ in telling you what you principally wish to be told—the present state of mine and Mrs. Unwin's health. In her I cannot perceive any alteration for the better; and must be satisfied, I believe, as indeed I have great reason to be, if she does not alter for the worse. She uses the orchard-walk daily, but always supported between two, and is still unable to employ herself as formerly. But she is cheerful, seldom in much pain, and has always strong confidence in the mercy and faithfulness of God.

As to myself, I have always the same song to sing—Well in body, but sick in spirit: sick, nigh unto death.

Seasons return, but not to me returns
 God, or the sweet approach of heavenly day,
 Or sight of cheering truth, or pardon seal'd,
 Or joy, or hope, or Jesus' face divine;
 But cloud, &c.

I could easily set my complaint to Milton's tone, and accompany him through the whole passage, on the subject of a blindness more deplorable than his ; but time fails me.

I feel great desire to see your intended publication ; a desire which the manner in which Mr. Bull speaks of it, who called here lately, has no tendency to allay. I believe I forgot to thank you for your last poetical present : not because I was not much pleased with it, but I write always in a hurry, and in a hurry must now conclude myself, with our united love, yours, my dear friend, most sincerely,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXIX

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, June 20, 1793.

. . . My poor Mary's infirm condition makes it impossible for me, at present, to engage in a work such as you propose. My thoughts are not sufficiently free, nor have I, nor can I, by any means, find opportunity. Added to it comes a difficulty, which, though you are not at all aware of it, presents itself to me under a most forbidding appearance : can you guess it?—No, not you ; neither perhaps will you be able to imagine that such a difficulty can possibly subsist. If your hair begins to bristle, stroke it down again, for there is no need why it should erect itself. It concerns me, not you. I know myself too well not

to know that I am nobody in verse, unless in a corner, and alone, and unconnected in my operations. This is not owing to want of love for you, my brother, or the most consummate confidence in you ; for I have both in a degree that has not been exceeded in the experience of any friend you have, or ever had. But I am so made up—I will not enter into a metaphysical analysis of my strange composition, in order to detect the true cause of this evil ; but on a general view of the matter, I suspect that it proceeds from that shyness, which has been my effectual and almost fatal hinderance on many other important occasions : and which I should feel, I well know, on this, to a degree that would perfectly cripple me. No ! I shall neither do, nor attempt any thing of consequence more, unless my poor Mary get better ; nor even then, unless it should please God to give me another nature, in concert with any man. I could not, even with my own father or brother, were they now alive. Small game must serve me at present ; and till I have done with Homer and Milton, a sonnet, or some such matter, must content me.' The utmost that I aspire to, and Heaven knows with how feeble a hope ! is to write at some better opportunity, and when my hands are free, *The Four Ages*. Thus I have opened my heart unto thee. . . .

CCCXXX

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, July 7, 1793.

MY DEAREST HAYLEY,

If the excessive heat of this day, which forbids me to do anything else, will permit me to scribble to you, I shall rejoice. To do this is a pleasure to me at all times, but to do it now a double one; because I am in haste to tell you how much I am delighted with your projected quadruple alliance,¹ and to assure you that if it please God to afford me health, spirits, ability, and leisure, I will not fail to devote them all to the production of my quota of *The Four Ages*.

You are very kind to humour me as you do, and had need be a little touched yourself with all my oddities, that you may know how to administer to mine. All whom I love do so, and I believe it to be impossible to love heartily those who do not. People must not do me good in *their* way, but in my *own*, and then they do me good indeed. My pride, my ambition, and my friendship for you, and the interest I take in my own dear self, will all be consulted and gratified by an arm-in-arm appearance with you in public; and I shall work with more zeal and assiduity at Homer, and, when Homer is finished, at Milton, with the prospect of such a coalition before me.

¹ A plan proposed by Hayley that Cowper and he should write a joint poem on *The Four Ages*, to be illustrated by two artists, Romney and perhaps Flaxman.

But what shall I do with a multitude of small pieces, from which I intended to select the best, and adding them to *The Four Ages*, to have made a volume? Will there be room for them upon your plan? I have retouched them, and will retouch them again. Some of them will suggest pretty devices to a designer, and in short I have a desire not to lose them.

I am at this moment, with all the imprudence natural to poets, expending nobody knows what in embellishing my premises, or rather the premises of my neighbour Courtenay, which is more poetical still. I have built one summer-house already, with the boards of my old study, and am building another spick and span, as they say. I have also a stone-cutter now at work, setting a bust of my dear old Grecian on a pedestal; and besides all this, I meditate still more that it is to be done in the autumn. Your project therefore is most opportune, as any project must needs be that has so direct a tendency to put money into the pocket of one so likely to want it.

Ah brother poet! send me of your shade,
And bid the Zephyrs hasten to my aid!
Or, like a worm, unearh'd at noon, I go
Dispatch'd by sunshine, to the shades below.

My poor Mary is as well as the heat will allow her to be, and whether it be cold or sultry, is always affectionately mindful of you and yours.

W. C.

CCCXXXI

To Thomas Park, Esq.

W. U., July 15, 1793.

DEAR SIR,

Within these few days I have received, by favour of Miss Knapps, your acceptable present of Chapman's translation of the *Iliad*. I know not whether the book be a rarity, but a curiosity it certainly is. I have as yet seen but little of it, enough however to make me wonder that any man, with so little taste for Homer, or apprehension of his manner, should think it worth while to undertake the laborious task of translating him; the hope of pecuniary advantage may perhaps account for it. His information, I fear, was not much better than his verse, for I have consulted him in one passage of some difficulty, and find him giving a sense of his own, not at all warranted by the words of Homer. Pope sometimes does this, and sometimes omits the difficult part entirely. I can boast of having done neither, though it has cost me infinite pains to exempt myself from the necessity.

I have seen a translation by Hobbes, which I prefer for its greater clumsiness. Many years have passed since I saw it, but it made me laugh immoderately. Poetry that is not good can only make amends for that deficiency by being ridiculous; and, because the translation of Hobbes has at least this

recommendation, I shall be obliged to you, should it happen to fall in your way, if you would be so kind as to procure it for me. The only edition of it I ever saw (and perhaps there never was another,) was a very thick 12mo., both print and paper bad, a sort of book that would be sought in vain, perhaps, anywhere but on a stall.

When you saw Lady Hesketh, you saw the relation of mine with whom I have been more intimate, even from childhood, than any other. She has seen much of the world, understands it well, and, having great natural vivacity, is of course one of the most agreeable companions.

I have now arrived almost at a close of my labours on the *Iliad*, and have left nothing behind me, I believe, which I shall wish to alter on any future occasion. In about a fortnight or three weeks I shall begin to do the same for the *Odyssey*, and hope to be able to perform it while the *Iliad* is in printing. Then Milton will demand all my attention, and when I shall find opportunity either to revise your MSS. or to write a poem of my own, which I have in contemplation, I can hardly say. Certainly not till both these tasks are accomplished.—I remain, dear sir, with many thanks for your kind present, sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXXII

*To Samuel Rose, Esq.*WESTON, *Aug. 22, 1793.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I rejoice that you have had so pleasant an excursion, and have beheld so many beautiful scenes. Except the delightful Upway I have seen them all. I have lived much at Southampton, have slept and caught a sore throat at Lyndhurst, and have swum in the bay of Weymouth. It will give us great pleasure to see you here, should your business give you an opportunity to finish your excursions of this season with one to Weston.

As for my going on, it is much as usual. I rise at six; an industrious and wholesome practice, from which I have never swerved since March. I breakfast generally about eleven, having given the intermediate time to my old delightful bard. Villoisson no longer keeps me company. I therefore now jog along with Clarke and Barnes at my elbow, and from the excellent annotations of the former select such as I think likely to be useful, or that recommend themselves by the amusement they may afford, of which sorts there are not a few. Barnes also affords me some of both kinds, but not so many, his notes being chiefly paraphrastical or grammatical. My only fear is lest between them both I should make my work too voluminous.

W. C.

CCCXXXIII

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, Aug. 27, 1793.

I thank you, my dear brother, for consulting the Gibbonian oracle on the question concerning Homer's Muse, and his blindness. I proposed it likewise to my little neighbour Buchanan, who gave me precisely the same answer. I felt an insatiable thirst to learn something new concerning him, and despairing of information from others, was willing to hope that I had stumbled on matter unnoticed by the commentators, and might perhaps acquire a little intelligence from himself. But the great and the little oracle together have extinguished that hope, and I despair now of making any curious discoveries about him.

Since Flaxman (which I did not know till your letter told me so,) has been at work for the *Iliad*, as well as the *Odyssey*, it seems a great pity, that the engravings should not be bound up with some Homer or other; and, as I said before, I should have been too proud to have bound them up in mine. But there is an objection, at least such it seems to me, that threatens to disqualify them for such a use, namely, the shape and size of them, which are such, that no book of the usual form could possibly receive them, save in a folded state, which I apprehend would be to murder them.

The monument of Lord Mansfield, for which you say he is engaged, will (I dare say) prove a noble effort of genius. Statuaries, as I have heard an eminent one say, do not much trouble themselves about a likeness: else I would give much to be able to communicate to Flaxman the perfect idea that I have of the subject, such as he was forty years ago. He was at that time wonderfully handsome, and would expound the most mysterious intricacies of the law, or recapitulate both matter and evidence of a cause, as long as from hence to Eartham, with an intelligent smile on his features, that bespoke plainly the perfect ease with which he did it. The most abstruse studies (I believe) never cost him any labour.

You say nothing lately of your intended journey our way: yet the year is waning, and the shorter days give you a hint to lose no time unnecessarily. Lately we had the whole family at the Hall, and now we have nobody. The Throckmortons are gone into Berkshire, and the Courtenays into Yorkshire. They are so pleasant a family, that I heartily wish you to see them; and at the same time wish to see you before they return, which will not be sooner than October. How shall I reconcile these wishes seemingly opposite? Why, by wishing that you may come soon and stay long. I know no other way of doing it.

My poor Mary is much as usual. I have set up Homer's head, and inscribed the pedestal; my own Greek at the top, with your translation under it, and

Ὡς δὲ παῖς ᾧ πατρὶ, &c.

It makes altogether a very smart and learned appearance.

W. C.

CCCXXXIV

To the Rev. John Johnson.

WESTON, Sept. 6, 1793.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,

To do a kind thing, and in a kind manner, is a double kindness, and no man is more addicted to both than you, or more skilful in contriving them. Your plan to surprise me agreeably succeeded to admiration. It was only the day before yesterday that, while we walked after dinner in the orchard, Mrs. Unwin between Sam and me, hearing the hall-clock, I observed a great difference between that and ours, and began immediately to lament, as I had often done, that there was not a sun-dial in all Weston to ascertain the true time for us. My complaint was long, and lasted till having turned into the grass walk, we reached the new building at the end of it; where we sat awhile and reposed ourselves. In a few minutes we returned by the way we came, when what think you was my astonishment to see what I had not seen before, though I had passed close by it, a smart sun-dial mounted on a smart stone pedestal! I assure you it seemed the effect of conjuration. I stopped short, and exclaimed, —“Why, here is a sun-dial, and upon our ground! How is this? Tell me, Sam, how came it here? Do

you know any thing about it?" At first I really thought (that is to say, as soon as I could think at all) that this fac-totum of mine, Sam Roberts, having often heard me deplore the want of one, had given orders for the supply of that want himself, without my knowledge, and was half pleased and half offended. But he soon exculpated himself by imputing the fact to you. It was brought up to Weston (it seems) about noon : but Andrews stopped the cart at the blacksmith's, whence he sent to inquire if I was gone for my walk. As it happened, I walked not till two o'clock. So there it stood waiting till I should go forth, and was introduced before my return. Fortunately too I went out at the church end of the village, and consequently saw nothing of it. How I could possibly pass it without seeing it, when it stood in the walk, I know not, but it is certain that I did. And where I shall fix it now, I know as little. It cannot stand between the two gates, the place of your choice, as I understand from Samuel, because the hay-cart must pass that way in the season. But we are now busy in winding the walk all round the orchard, and in doing so shall doubtless stumble at last upon some open spot that will suit it.

There it shall stand, while I live, a constant monument of your kindness.

I have this moment finished the twelfth book of the *Odyssey* ; and I read the *Iliad* to Mrs. Unwin every evening.

The effect of this reading is that I still spy

blemishes, something at least that I can mend, so that after all, the transcript of alterations, which you and George have made, will not be a perfect one. It would be foolish to forego an opportunity of improvement for such a reason; neither will I. It is ten o'clock, and I must breakfast. Adieu, therefore, my dear Johnny! Remember your appointment to see us in October.—Ever yours,

W. C.

CCCXXXV

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, Sept. 8, 1793.

Non sum quod simulo, my dearest brother! I seem cheerful upon paper sometimes, when I am absolutely the most dejected of all creatures. Desirous however to gain something myself by my own letters, unprofitable as they may and must be to my friends, I keep melancholy out of them as much as I can, that I may, if possible, by assuming a less gloomy air, deceive myself, and, by feigning with a continuance, improve the fiction into reality.

So you have seen Flaxman's figures, which I intended you should not have seen till I had spread them before you. How did you dare to look at them? You should have covered your eyes with both hands. I am charmed with Flaxman's Penelope, and though you do not deserve that I should, will send you

a few lines, such as they are, with which she inspired me the other day while I was taking my noon-day walk.

I know not that you will meet any body here, when we see you in October, unless perhaps my Johnny should happen to be with us. If Tom is charmed with the thoughts of coming to Weston, we are equally so with the thoughts of seeing him here. At his years I should hardly hope to make his visit agreeable to him, did I not know that he is of a temper and disposition that must make him happy every where. Give our love to him. If Romney can come with you, we have both room to receive him, and hearts to make him most welcome.

W. C.

CCCXXXVI

To Mrs. Courtenay.

Sept. 15. 1793.

A thousand thanks, my dearest Catharina, for your pleasant letter; one of the pleasantest that I have received since your departure. You are very good to apologize for your delay, but I had not flattered myself with the hopes of a speedier answer. Knowing full well your talents for entertaining your friends who are present, I was sure you would with difficulty find half an hour that you could devote to an absent one.

I am glad that you think of your return. Poor Weston is a desolation without you. In the mean

time I amuse myself as well as I can, thrumming old Homer's lyre, and turning the premises upside down. Upside down indeed, for so it is literally that I have been dealing with the orchard, almost ever since you went, digging and delving it around to make a new walk, which now begins to assume the shape of one, and to look as if some time or other it may serve in that capacity. Taking my usual exercise there the other day with Mrs. Unwin, a wide disagreement between your clock and ours, occasioned me to complain much, as I have often done, of the want of a dial. Guess my surprise, when at the close of my complaint I saw one—saw one close at my side; a smart one, glittering in the sun, and mounted on a pedestal of stone. I was astonished. "This," I exclaimed, "is absolute conjuration!"—It was a most mysterious affair, but the mystery was at last explained.

This scribble I presume will find you just arrived at Bucklands. I would with all my heart that since dials can be thus suddenly conjured from one place to another, I could be so too, and could start up before your eyes in the middle of some walk or lawn, where you and Lady Frog are wandering.

While Pitcairne whistles for his family estate in Fifeshire, he will do well if he will sound a few notes for me. I am originally of the same shire, and a family of my name is still there, to whom perhaps he may whistle on my behalf, not altogether in vain. So shall his fife excel all my poetical efforts, which have

not yet, and I daresay never will, effectually charm one acre of ground into my possession.

Remember me to Sir John, Lady Frog, and your husband ;—tell them I love them all. She told me once she was jealous, now indeed she seems to have some reason, since to her I have not written, and have written twice to you. But bid her be of good courage, in due time I will give her proof of my constancy.

W. C.

CCCXXXVII

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, Oct. 5, 1793.

My good intentions towards you, my dearest brother, are continually frustrated ; and which is most provoking, not by such engagements and avocations as have a right to my attention, such as those to my Mary, and to the old bard of Greece, but by mere impertinencies, such as calls of civility from persons not very interesting to me, and letters from a distance still less interesting, because the writers of them are strangers. A man sent me a long copy of verses, which I could do no less than acknowledge. They were silly enough, and cost me eighteen pence, which was seventeen pence halfpenny farthing more than they were worth. Another sent me at the same time a plan, requesting my opinion of it, and that I would

lend him my name as editor ; a request with which I shall not comply, but I am obliged to tell him so, and one letter is all that I have time to dispatch in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes I am not able to write at all. Thus it is that my time perishes, and I can neither give so much of it as I would to you or to any other valuable purpose.

On Tuesday we expect company. Mr. Rose and Lawrence the painter. Yet once more is my patience to be exercised, and once more I am made to wish that my face had been moveable, to put on and take off at pleasure, so as to be portable in a bandbox, and sent to the artist. These however will be gone, as I believe I told you, before you arrive, at which time I know not that any body will be here, except my Johnny, whose presence will not at all interfere with our readings. You will not, I believe, find me a very slashing critic ;—I hardly indeed expect to find any thing in your *Life of Milton* that I shall sentence to amputation. How should it be too long ? A well written work, sensible and spirited, such as yours was when I saw it, is never so. But however we shall see. I promise to spare nothing that I think may be lopped off with advantage.

I began this letter yesterday, but could not finish it till now. I have risen this morning like an infernal frog out of Acheron, covered with the ooze and mud of melancholy. For this reason I am not sorry to find myself at the bottom of my paper, for had I more room perhaps I might fill it all with croaking, and make an

heart ache at Eartham, which I wish to be always cheerful. Adieu. My poor sympathising Mary is of course sad, but always mindful of you.

W. C.

CCCXXXVIII

To Mrs. Charlotte Smith.

WESTON-UND^D, Oct. 26, 1793.

DEAR MADAM,

Your two counsellors are of one mind. We both are of opinion that you will do well to make your second volume a suitable companion to the first, by embellishing it in the same manner; and have no doubt, considering the well-deserved popularity of your verse, that the expense will be amply refunded by the public.

I would give you, Madam, not my counsel only, but consolation also, were I not disqualified for that delightful service by a great dearth of it in my own experience. I too, often seek but cannot find it. Of this however I can assure you, if that may at all comfort you, that both my friend Hayley and myself most truly sympathize with you under all your sufferings; neither have you, I am persuaded, in any degree lost the interest you always had in him, or your claim to any service of whatever kind that it may be in his power to render you. Had you no other title to his esteem, his respect for your talents and his feelings for your misfortunes must insure to you the friendship of

such a man for ever. I know, however, that there are seasons when, look which way we will, we see the same dismal gloom enveloping all objects. This is itself an affliction, and the worse because it makes us think ourselves more unhappy than we are; and at such a season it is, I doubt not, that you suspect a diminution of our friend's zeal to serve you.

I was much struck by an expression in your letter to Hayley where you say that "you will endeavour to take an interest in green leaves again." This seems the sound of my own voice reflected to me from a distance, I have so often had the same thought and desire. A day scarcely passes at this season of the year when I do not contemplate the trees so soon to be stript, and say, perhaps I shall never see you clothed again; every year as it passes makes this expectation more reasonable, and the year, with me, cannot be very distant when the event will verify it. Well—may God grant us a good hope of arriving in due time where the leaves never fall, and all will be right.

Mrs. Unwin I think is a little better than when you saw her, but still feeble; so feeble as to keep me in a state of continual apprehension. I live under the point of a sword suspended by a hair. She begs you to accept her compliments.—Adieu, my dear madam, believe me, your sincere and affectionate humble servant,

WM. COWPER.

CCCXXXIX

To Mrs. Courtenay.

WESTON, Nov. 4, 1793.

I seldom rejoice in a day of soaking rain like this ; but in this, my dearest Catharina, I do rejoice sincerely, because it affords me an opportunity of writing to you, which if fair weather had invited us into the orchard walk at the usual hour, I should not easily have found. I am a most busy man, busy to a degree that sometimes half distracts me ; but if complete distraction be occasioned by having the thoughts too much and too long attached to a single point, I am in no danger of it, with such a perpetual whirl are mine whisked about from one subject to another. When two poets meet there are fine doings I can assure you. My Homer finds work for Hayley, and his *Life of Milton* work for me, so that we are neither of us one moment idle. Poor Mrs. Unwin in the mean time sits quiet in her corner, occasionally laughing at us both, and not seldom interrupting us with some question or remark, for which she is constantly rewarded by me with a "Hush—hold your peace." Bless yourself, my dear Catharina, that you are not connected with a poet, especially that you have not two to deal with ; ladies who have, may be bidden indeed to hold their peace, but very little peace have they. How should they in fact have any, continually enjoined as they are to be silent? . . .

The same fever that has been so epidemic there, has been severely felt here likewise: some have died, and a multitude have been in danger. Two under our own roof have been infected with it, and I am not sure that I have perfectly escaped myself, but I am now well again.

I have persuaded Hayley to stay a week longer, and again my hopes revive, that he may yet have an opportunity to know my friends before he returns into Sussex. I write amidst a chaos of interruptions: Hayley on one hand spouts Greek, and on the other hand Mrs. Unwin continues talking, sometimes to us, and sometimes, because we are both too busy to attend to her, she holds a dialogue with herself.—Query, is not this a bull—and ought I not instead of dialogue to have said soliloquy?

Adieu! With our united love to all your party, and with ardent wishes soon to see you all at Weston, I remain, my dearest Catharina, ever yours,

W. C.

CCCXL

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

WESTON, Nov. 5, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In a letter from Lady Hesketh, which I received not long since, she informed me how very pleasantly she had spent some time at Wargrave. We now

begin to expect her here, where our charms of situation are perhaps not equal to yours, yet by no means contemptible. She told me she had spoken to you in very handsome terms of the country round about us, but not so of our house, and the view before. The house itself however is not unworthy some commendation; small as it is, it is neat, and neater than she is aware of; for my study and the room over it have been repaired and beautified this summer, and little more was wanting to make it an abode sufficiently commodious for a man of my moderate desires. As to the prospect from it, that she misrepresented strangely, as I hope soon to have an opportunity to convince her by ocular demonstration. She told you, I know, of certain cottages opposite to us, or rather she described them as poor houses and hovels that effectually blind our windows. But none such exist. On the contrary, the opposite object, and the only one, is an orchard, so well planted, and with trees of such growth, that we seem to look into a wood, or rather to be surrounded by one. Thus, placed as we are in the midst of a village, we have none of the disagreeables that belong to such a position, and the village itself is one of the prettiest I know; terminated at one end by the church tower, seen through trees, and at the other, by a very handsome gateway, opening into a fine grove of elms, belonging to our neighbour Courtenay.¹ How happy should I be to

¹ By the death of Sir Roberton Throckmorton in 1791, Cowper's friend Mr. John Throckmorton of Weston became Sir

show it instead of describing it to you!—Adieu, my dear friend,

W. C.

CCCXLI

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, Nov. 29, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have risen while the owls are still hooting, to pursue my accustomed labours in the mine of Homer ; but before I enter upon them, shall give the first moment of daylight to the purpose of thanking you for your last letter, containing many pleasant articles of intelligence, with nothing to abate the pleasantness of them, except the single circumstance that we are not likely to see you here so soon as I expected. My hope was, that the first frost would bring you, and the amiable painter with you. If, however, you are prevented by the business of your respective professions, you are well prevented, and I will endeavour to be patient. When the latter was here, he mentioned one day the subject of Diomedes's horses, driven under the axle of his chariot by the thunderbolt which fell at their feet, as a subject for his pencil. It is certainly a noble one, and therefore worthy of his study and attention. It occurred to me at the moment, but I know not what

John Throckmorton of Bucklands in Berkshire, to which he and Lady Throckmorton removed in March 1792. He was succeeded in the estate of Weston by his next brother, Mr. George Courtenay.

it was that made me forget it again the next moment, that the horses of Achilles flying over the foss, with Patroclus and Automedon in the chariot, would be a good companion for it. Should you happen to recollect this, when you next see him, you may submit it, if you please, to his consideration. I stumbled yesterday on another subject, which reminded me of said excellent artist, as likely to afford a fine opportunity to the expression that he could give it. It is found in the shooting-match in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*, between Meriones and Teucer. The former cuts the string with which the dove is tied to the mast-head, and sets her at liberty; the latter standing at his side, in all the eagerness of emulation, points an arrow at the mark with his right hand, while with his left he snatches the bow from his competitor. He is a fine poetical figure; but Mr. Lawrence himself must judge whether or not he promises as well for the canvass.

He does great honour to my physiognomy by his intention to get it engraved; and though I think I foresee that this *private publication* will grow in time into a publication of absolute publicity, I find it impossible to be dissatisfied with any thing that seems eligible both to him and you. To say the truth, when a man has once turned his mind inside out for the inspection of all who choose to inspect it, to make a secret of his face seems but little better than a self-contradiction. At the same time, however, I shall be best pleased if it be kept, according to your intentions, as a rarity.

I have lost Hayley, and begin to be uneasy at not hearing from him: tell me about him when you write.

I should be happy to have a work of mine embellished by Lawrence, and made a companion for a work of Hayley's. It is an event to which I look forward with the utmost complacence. I cannot tell you what a relief I feel it, not to be pressed for Milton.

W. C.

CCCXLII

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

WESTON, Dec. 8, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In my last I forgot to thank you for the box of books, containing also the pamphlets. We have read, that is to say my cousin has who reads to us in an evening, *The History of Jonathan Wild*; and found it highly entertaining. The satire on great men is witty, and I believe perfectly just: we have no censure to pass on it, unless that we think the character of Mrs. Heartfree not well sustained,—not quite delicate in the latter part of it,—and that the constant effect of her charms upon every man who sees her has a sameness in it that is tiresome, and betrays either much carelessness, or idleness, or lack of invention. It is possible indeed that the author might intend by this circumstance a satirical glance at novelists, whose heroines are generally all

bewitching ; but it is a fault that he had better have noticed in another manner, and not have exemplified in his own.

The first volume of *Man as he is* has lain unread in my study window this twelvemonth, and would have been returned unread to its owner, had not my cousin come in good time to save it from that disgrace. We are now reading it, and find it excellent—abounding with wit and just sentiment, and knowledge both of books and men.—Adieu ! W. C.

CCCXLIII

To William Hayley, Esq.

WESTON, Jan. 5, 1794.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,

I have waited, but waited in vain, for a propitious moment, when I might give my old friend's¹ objections the consideration they deserve ; I shall at last be forced to send a vague answer, unworthy to be sent to a person accustomed, like him, to close reasoning and abstruse discussion, for I rise after ill rest, and with a frame of mind perfectly unsuited to the occasion. I sit too at the window for light's sake, where I am so cold that my pen slips out of my fingers. First, I will give you a translation *de novo* of this untranslatable prayer. It is shaped as nearly

¹ Thurlow, to whose criticisms Cowper paid more attention than they deserved.

as I could contrive to his lordship's ideas, but I have little hope that it will satisfy him.

Grant Jove, and all ye gods, that this my son
Be, as myself have been, illustrious here !
A valiant man ! and let him reign in Troy ;
May all who witness his return from fight
Hereafter, say—he far excels his sire ;
And let him bring back gory trophies, stripp'd
From foes slain by him, to his mother's joy.

Imlac, in *Rasselas*, says—I forget to whom—"You have convinced me that it is impossible to be a poet." In like manner I might say to his Lordship, you have convinced me that it is impossible to be a translator ; to be a translator, on his terms at least, is, I am sure, impossible. On his terms I would defy Homer himself, were he alive, to translate the *Paradise Lost* into Greek. Yet Milton had Homer much in his eye when he composed that poem. Whereas Homer never thought of me or my translation. There are minutiae in every language, which transfused into another will spoil the version. Such extreme fidelity is in fact unfaithful ; such close resemblance takes away all likeness. The original is elegant, easy, natural ; the copy is clumsy, constrained, unnatural. To what is this owing ? To the adoption of terms not congenial to your purpose, and of a context such as no man writing an original work would make use of. Homer is every thing that a poet should be. A translation of Homer so made, will be every thing that a translation of Homer should not be : because it will be written in no language under heaven ;—it will be English, and

it will be Greek ; and therefore it will be neither. He is the man, whoever he be,—(I do not pretend to be that man myself;) he is the man best qualified as a translator of Homer, who has drenched, and steeped, and soaked himself in the effusions of his genius, till he has imbibed their colour to the bone ; and who, when he is thus dyed through and through, distinguishing between what is essentially Greek, and what may be habited in English, rejects the former, and is faithful to the latter, as far as the purposes of fine poetry will permit, and no further : this I think, may be easily proved. Homer is every where remarkable either for ease, dignity, or energy of expression ; for grandeur of conception, and a majestic flow of numbers. If we copy him so closely as to make every one of these excellent properties of his absolutely unattainable, which will certainly be the effect of too close a copy, instead of translating we murder him. Therefore, after all that his Lordship has said, I still hold freedom to be an indispensable. Freedom, I mean, with respect to the expression ; freedom so limited, as never to leave behind the *matter* ; but at the same time indulged with a sufficient scope to secure the spirit, and as much as possible of the manner. I say as much as possible, because an English manner must differ from a Greek one, in order to be graceful, and for this there is no remedy. Can an ungraceful, awkward translation of Homer be a good one ? No. But a graceful, easy, natural, faithful version of him, will not that be a good one ? Yes. Allow me but

this, and I insist upon it, that such a one may be produced on my principles, and can be produced on no other.

I have not had time to criticise his Lordship's other version. You know how little time I have for any thing, and can tell him so.

Adieu ! my dear brother. I have now tired both you and myself ; and with the love of the whole trio, remain, yours ever,

W. C.

Reading his Lordship's sentiments over again, I am inclined to think that in all I have said, I have only given him back the same in other terms. He disallows both the absolute *free*, and the absolute *close* ;—so do I ; and, if I understand myself, have said so in my Preface. He wishes to recommend a medium, though he will not call it so ; so do I : only we express it differently. What is it then we dispute about ? My head is not good enough to-day to discover.

LETTERS FROM NORFOLK

1795-1798

CCCXLIV

To Lady Hesketh, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

MUNDESLEY, NEAR NORTH WALSHAM,
Aug. 27, 1795.

Hopeless as ever, and chiefly to gratify myself by once more setting pen to paper, I address a very few lines to one whom it would be a comfort to me to gratify as much by sending them. The most forlorn of beings I tread a shore under the burthen of infinite despair, that I once trod all cheerfulness and joy. I view every vessel that approaches the coast with an eye of jealousy and fear, lest it arrive with a commission to seize me. But my insensibility, which you say is a mystery to you, because it seems incompatible with such fear, has the effect of courage, and enables me to go forth, as if on purpose to place myself in the way of danger. The cliff is here of a height that it is terrible to look down from; and yesterday evening, by moonlight, I passed sometimes

within a foot of the edge of it, from which to have fallen would probably have been to be dashed in pieces. But though to have been dashed in pieces would perhaps have been best for me, I shrunk from the precipice, and am waiting to be dashed in pieces by other means. At two miles distance on the coast is a solitary pillar of rock, that the crumbling cliff has left at the high water-mark. I have visited it twice, and have found it an emblem of myself. Torn from my natural connexions, I stand alone and expect the storm that shall displace me.

I have no expectation that I shall ever see you more, though Samuel assures me that I shall visit Weston again, and that you will meet me there. My terrors, when I left it, would not permit me to say—Farewell for ever—which now I do; wishing, but vainly wishing to see you yet once more, and equally wishing that I could now as confidently, and as warmly as once I could, subscribe myself affectionately yours; but every feeling that would warrant the doing it, has, as you too well know, long since forsaken the bosom of

W. C.

Mr. Johnson is gone to North Walsham, and knows not that I write.

Mrs. Unwin sends her affectionate respects and compliments.

CCCXLV

To the Rev. Mr. Buchanan.

MUNDSLEY, Sept. 5, 1795.

——to interpose a little ease,
Let my frail thoughts dally with false surmise !

I will forget for a moment, that to whomsoever I may address myself, a letter from me can no otherwise be welcome, than as a curiosity. To you, Sir, I address this ; urged to it by extreme penury of employment, and the desire I feel to learn something of what is doing, and has been done at Weston (my beloved Weston !) since I left it.

The coldness of these blasts, even in the hottest days, has been such, that added to the irritation of the salt spray, with which they are always charged, they have occasioned me an inflammation in the eyelids, which threatened a few days since to confine me entirely ; but absenting myself as much as possible from the beach, and guarding my face with an umbrella, that inconvenience is in some degree abated. My chamber commands a very near view of the ocean, and the ships at high water approach the coast so closely, that a man furnished with better eyes than mine might, I doubt not, discern the sailors from the window. No situation, at least when the weather is clear and bright, can be pleasanter ; which you will easily credit, when I add that it imparts something a little resembling pleasure even

to me.—Gratify me with news from Weston! If Mr. Gregson, and your neighbours the Courtenays are there, mention me to them in such terms as you see good. Tell me if my poor birds are living? I never see the herbs I used to give them without a recollection of them, and sometimes am ready to gather them, forgetting that I am not at home. Pardon this intrusion!

Mrs. Unwin continues much as usual.

CCCXLVI

To Lady Hesketh, Cheltenham.

Mr. Johnson is again absent; gone to Mattishall, a circumstance to which I am indebted for an opportunity to answer your letter as soon almost as I have received it. Were he present, I feel that I could not do it.—You say it gives you pleasure to hear from me, and I resolve to forget for a moment my conviction that it is impossible for me to give pleasure to any body. You have heard much from my lips that I am sure has given you none; if what comes from my pen be less unpalatable, none has therefore so strong a claim to it as yourself.

My walks on the sea-shore have been paid for by swelled and inflamed eyelids, and I now recollect that such was always the condition of mine in the same situation. A natural effect I suppose, at least upon

eyelids so subject to disorder as mine, of the salt spray and cold winds, which on the coast are hardly ever less than violent. I now therefore abandon my favourite walk, and wander in lanes and under hedges. As heavy a price I have paid for a long journey, performed on foot to a place called Hazeborough. That day was indeed a day spent in walking. I was much averse to the journey, both on account of the distance and the uncertainty of what I should find there; but Mr. Johnson insisted. We set out accordingly, and I was almost ready to sink with fatigue long before we reached the place of our destination. The only inn was full of company; but my companion having an opportunity to borrow a lodging for an hour or two, he did so, and thither we retired. We learned on enquiry, that the place is eight miles distant from this, and though, by the help of a guide, we shortened it about a mile in our return, the length of the way occasioned me a fever, which I have had now these four days, and perhaps shall not be rid of in four more; perhaps never. Mr. J. and Samuel, after dinner, visited the light-house. A gratification which would have been none to me for several reasons, but especially because I found no need to add to the number of steps I had to take before I should find myself at home again. I learned however from them that it is a curious structure. The building is circular, but the stairs are not so, flight above flight, with a commodious landing at every twentieth stair, they ascend to the height of four stories; and there is a

spacious and handsome apartment at every landing. The light is given by the patent lamp, of which there are two ranges : six lamps in the upper range, and five in the lower ; both ranges, as you may suppose, at the top of the house. Each lamp has a broad silver reflector behind it. The present occupant was once commander of a large merchant-man, but, having chastised a boy of his crew with too much severity, was displaced and consequently ruined. He had, however, a friend in the Trinity-House, who, soon after this was built, asked him if he would accept the charge of it ; and the cashiered captain, judging it better to be such a lamp-lighter than to starve, very readily and very wisely closed with the offer. He has only the trouble of scouring the silver plates every day, and of rising every night at twelve to trim the lamps, for which he has a competent salary, (Samuel forgets the amount of it,) and he and his family a pleasant and comfortable abode.

I have said as little of myself as I could, that my letter might be more worth the postage. My next will perhaps be less worth it, should any next ensue ; for I meet with little variety, and shall not be very willing to travel fifteen miles on foot again, to find it. I have seen no fish since I came here, except a dead sprat upon the sands, and one piece of cod, from Norwich, too stale to be eaten.—Adieu.

W. C.

CCCXLVII

*To Lady Hesketh, Cheltenham.*MUNDESLY, *Sept. 26, 1795.*

Mr. Johnson is gone forth again, and again, for the last time I suppose that I shall ever do it, I address a line to you. I knew not of his intentions to leave me till the day before he did so. Like every thing else that constitutes my wretched lot, this departure of his was sudden, and shocked me accordingly. He enjoined me before he went, if I wrote at all in his absence, to write to Mr. Newton. But I cannot, and so I told him. Whither he is gone I know not; at least I know not by information from himself. Samuel tells me that he thinks his destination is to Weston. But why to Weston is unimaginable to me. I shall never see Weston more. I have been tossed like a ball into a far country, from which there is no rebound for me. There indeed I lived a life of infinite despair, and such is my life in Norfolk. Such indeed it would be in any given spot upon the face of the globe; but to have passed the little time that remained to me there, was the desire of my heart. My heart's desire however has been always frustrated in every thing that it ever settled on, and by means that have made my disappointments inevitable. When I left Weston I despaired of reaching Norfolk, and now that I have reached Norfolk, I am equally

hopeless of ever reaching Weston more. What a lot is mine ! Why was existence given to a creature that might possibly, and would probably become wretched in the degree that I have been so ? and whom misery, such as mine, was almost sure to overwhelm in a moment. But the question is vain. I existed by a decree from which there was no appeal, and on terms the most tremendous, because unknown to, and even unsuspected by me ; difficult to be complied with had they been foreknown, and unforeknown, impracticable. Of this truth I have no witness but my own experience ; a witness, whose testimony will not be admitted. But farewell to a subject with which I can only weary you, and blot the paper to no purpose.

You assure me that I shall see you again ; tell me where and when, I shall see you, and I will believe you if it be possible.

Samuel desires me to present his duty to you. His wife is gone to Weston, and he wishes me to say that if Mrs. Herbert has any concerns there that Nanny can settle for her, and will give her the necessary directions, she may depend upon their being exactly attended to. With Mrs. Unwin's respects, I remain the forlorn and miserable being I was when I wrote last.

W. C.

CCCXLVIII

To Lady Hesketh.

MUNDSLEY, Oct. 13, 1798.

DEAR COUSIN,

You describe delightful scenes, but you describe them to one who, if he even saw them, could receive no delight from them,—who has a faint recollection, and so faint as to be like an almost forgotten dream, that once he was susceptible of pleasure from such causes. The country that you have had in prospect¹ has been always famed for its beauties; but the wretch who can derive no gratification from a view of nature, even under the disadvantage of her most ordinary dress, will have no eyes to admire her in any. In one day, in one moment I should rather have said, she became an *universal blank* to me, and, though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove, as blindness itself. In this country, if there are not mountains, there are hills; if not broad and deep rivers, yet such as are sufficient to embellish a prospect; and an object still more magnificent than any river, the ocean itself, is almost immediately under the window. Why is scenery like this, I had almost said, why is the very scene, which many years since I could not contemplate without rapture, now become, at the best, an insipid wilderness to me? It neighbours nearly, and as nearly resembles the scenery

¹ The country about Clifton, where Lady Hesketh then was.

of Catfield ; but with what different perceptions does it present me ! The reason is obvious. My state of mind is a medium through which the beauties of Paradise itself could not be communicated with any effect but a painful one.

There is a wide interval between us, which it would be far easier for you than for me to pass. Yet I should in vain invite you. We shall meet no more. I know not what Mr. Johnson said of me in the long letter he addressed to you yesterday, but nothing, I am sure, that could make such an event seem probable. —I remain as usual, dear cousin, yours,

WM. COWPER.

LIST OF CORRESPONDENTS

TO WHOM THE LETTERS ARE ADDRESSED

The numbers refer to the Letters

- Austen, Lady, LXXXVIII
 Bagot, Rev. Walter, CLXIX, CLXXVII, CLXXXIII, CXCIV, CCXXVIII,
 CCXLI, CCLII, CCLIII, CCLXVII, CCLXXIV, CCLXXVII, CCLXXXI,
 CCLXXXVI, CCCXXVI
 Bodham, Mrs., CCLVII, CCLXIX
 Buchanan, Rev. John, CCCXLV
 Bull, Rev. William, LXXXVI, XCV, XCVII, C, CI, CCLXXXV, CCC
 Courtenay, Mrs., CCCIV, CCCVIII, CCCXXXVI, CCCXXXIX
 Cowper, Major, VIII
 Cowper, Mrs., XI, XII, XXXI, XXXIX, XLV, LXX
 Greatheed, Rev. Samuel, CCCIII
 Hayley, William, CCXCII, CCXCV, CCXCVI, CCXCVII, CCXCIX, CCCI,
 CCCIX, CCCX, CCCXI, CCCXIII, CCCXV, CCCXVI, CCCXXI,
 CCCXXII, CCCXXV, CCCXXVII, CCCXXIX, CCCXXX, CCCXXXIII,
 CCCXXXV, CCCXXXVII, CCCXLIII
 Hesketh, Lady, II, IV, VI, VII, CXLV, CXLVII, CXLVIII, CL, CLI,
 CLIII, CLV, CLVI, CLVII, CLVIII, CLIX, CLX, CLXI, CLXII,
 CLXIII, CLXIV, CLXV, CLXVI, CLXVII, CLXVIII, CLXX, CLXXI,
 CLXXII, CLXXIV, CLXXXVIII, CLXXXIX, CXCI, CXCI, CXCI,
 CXCVI, CXCVI, CC, CCI, CCI, CCIV, CCV, CCVI, CCVII, CCIX,
 CCX, CCXI, CCXII, CCXIII, CCXIV, CCXVI, CCXVII, CCXIX,
 CCXXI, CCXXIV, CCXXVI, CCXXVII, CCXXX, CCXXXI, CCXXXII,
 CCXXXIV, CCXLII, CCXLV, CCLVI, CCLIX, CCLXI, CCLXIV,
 CCLXVI, CCLXVIII, CCLXXVIII, CCLXXXIV, CCLXXXVIII,
 CCXCIV, CCCVI, CCCVII, CCCXIV, CCCXVIII, CCCXLIV, CCCXLVI,
 CCCXLVII, CCCXLVIII
 Hill, Joseph, III, V, IX, X, XIII, XIV, XV, XXII, XLIII, LI, LV,
 LXXIV, LXXVIII, LXXXIX, XCII, CIV, CV, CIX, CXXVIII, CXXIX,
 CXXXI, CXXXIV, CXLI, CLXXIII, CLXXV, CXI, CCXXIII, CCXXV,
 CCXLIX, CCLXII, CCLXX, CCLXXVI, CCXIII, CCCXXIII, CCCXL

- Hurdis, Rev. James, CCLXXXIII, CCLXXXVII, CCCXX
 Johnson, John, CCLX, CCLXXII, CCLXXV, CCLXXXII, CCCXVII,
 CCCXXIV, CCCXXXIV
 Johnson, Joseph, CXXXIII, CCXCVIII
 King, Mrs., CCXVIII, CCXXII, CCXXIX, CCXXXIII, CCXXXV,
 CCXXXVIII, CCXL, CCLVIII, CCLXV
 Newton, Rev. John, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXXII, XXXVI,
 XXXVIII, XLI, XLIV, XLVIII, L, LII, LIII, LVIII, LX, LXIII,
 LXIV, LXVII, LXXIII, LXXX, XCH, XCIV, XCVIII, XCIX, CVI,
 CVIII, CXI, CXII, CXIV, CXV, CXVII, CXX, CXXIII, CXXIV,
 CXXVII, CXXX, CXXXII, CXXXVI, CXXXVII, CXXXIX, CXLII,
 CXLIV, CXLVI, CXLIX, CLII, CLXXVIII, CLXXXV, CLXXXVII,
 CXCV, CCXXXVI, CCL, CCLXXI, CCLXXIX, CCXCI, CCCV,
 CCCXXVIII
 Newton, Mrs., XXVI, XXXIII, LXII, LXVI, XCI
 Park, Thomas, CCCXXXI
 Rose, Samuel, CXCVII, CXCVIII, CCH, CCVIII, CCXX, CCXXXVII,
 CCXXXIX, CCXLIH, CCXLIV, CCXLVII, CCXLVIII, CCLI, CCLIV,
 CCLV, CCLXXIII, CCXC, CCCXII, CCCXIX, CCCXXXII, CCCXLI,
 CCCXLII
 Rowley, Clotworthy, I, CCXV, CCLXXXIX
 Smith, Mrs. Charlotte, CCCXXXVIII
 Teedon, Samuel, CCCII
 Throckmorton, Mrs. John, CCXLVI, CCLXIII, CCLXXX
 Unwin, Rev. William, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXIII,
 XXIV, XXV, XXX, XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVII, XL, XLII, XLVI,
 XLVII, XLIX, LIV, LVI, LVII, LIX, LXI, LXV, LXVIII, LXIX,
 LXXI, LXXII, LXXV, LXXVI, LXXVII, LXXIX, LXXXI, LXXXII,
 LXXXIII, LXXXIV, LXXXV, LXXXVII, XC, XCVI, CH, CII,
 CVII, CX, CXIII, CXVI, CXVIII, CXIX, CXXI, CXXII, CXXV,
 CXXVI, CXXXV, CXXXVIII, CXL, CXLIII, CLIV, CLXXVI, CLXXIX,
 CLXXX, CLXXXI, CLXXXII, CLXXXIV, CLXXXVI

INDEX

TO THE LETTERS

The numbers refer to the volume and page

- Abbey, Westminster, i. 253
 Abbot, L., the painter, ii. 323,
 325 *sq.*, 328, 355
 Acheron, a frog of, ii. 392
 Achilles, horses of, ii. 399
 Adam, Cowper's dream of, i.
 278 *sq.*
 Addison, i. 285, ii. 215; on
 Milton, 369; his style, i.
 265; his humour, ii. 142
 Africa, ants and serpents in, ii.
 265
 Alston, Cowper's friend, ii. 167
 America, war with, i. 162, 163,
 166 *sqq.*, 225 *sq.*
Analytical Review, The, ii. 361
 Ancestors of Cowper, ii. 370 *sq.*
 Animals, Cowper's attachment
 to, ii. 292
 Anne, Lady, i. 109
 Anonymous, the (Theodora
 Cowper), ii. 28, 147, 148
 Antediluvian world, the, i.
 266 *sq.*
 Ants in Africa, ii. 265
Arabian Nights Entertainment,
 i. 370
 Arbuthnot, i. 244, 285
 Archimedes, ii. 220
Argenis of Barclay, ii. 125, 129
 Aristotle, i. 298
 Ashburner, Mr., i. 288, 289, 300
 Aspray, Mrs., i. 60
 Astwoodberry, ii. 38
 August, 1792, in Paris, ii. 342
 Ausonius, i. 116
 Austen, Lady, i. 130 *sq.*, 140,
 143, 149 *sq.*, 153, 176, 177,
 183 *sqq.*, 189 *sqq.*, 211, 231,
 280, 324, 416 *sq.*, ii. 10, 25
 Austen, Sir Robert, i. 416
 Autumn at Olney, i. 247
 Aviary at Weston, ii. 229
 Bacon, John, the sculptor, i.
 252 *sq.*, 279, 403, ii. 201
 Bagot, Bishop, ii. 265
 Bagot, Lord, i. 384, ii. 238
 Bagot, Lady, ii. 298 *sq.*
 Bagot, Miss, ii. 36
 Bagot, Rev. Walter, i. 384,
 385, 388, 394, ii. 4, 5 *sq.*,
 354
 Bagotism, ii. 289
 Baker's *Chronicle*, ii. 133 *sq.*
 Ball, Geary, i. 340
 Ballads, early, of Cowper, i.
 163; English, i. 244 *sq.*; on
 the negroes, Cowper's, ii. 180
 Balloons, i. 249 *sq.*, 257, 260
 sq., 269 *sqq.*, 301 *sq.*, 307 *sq.*,
 335
 Barclay's *Argenis*, ii. 125, 129
 Barham, Mr., i. 99, 164, 165

- Barnes's Homer, ii. 48, 383
 Barnet, ii. 330, 334, 335
 Bates, Mr., i. 359
 Bath, ii. 353
 Battison, Mrs., ii. 213, 214
 Battledore and shuttlecock, i. 223
 Beadle, the pitiful, i. 259
 Beattie, J., the poet, i. 285 *sq.*, 290 *sq.*, 292, 296, 297 *sq.*
 Beau, Cowper's dog, ii. 154, 197, 204, 328, 337
 Beckford, Alderman, i. 43
 Bells, the sound of, ii. 69; muffled, 227
 Bensley, i. 11, 354
 Bentley, Richard, i. 59, 60; his criticism of Homer, ii. 243 *sq.*
 Berkhamstead, Cowper's birth-place, ii. 135, 214, 249
 Bevis's Mount, ii. 56
Biographia Britannica, i. 67, 88
 Birds, Cowper's, ii. 408
 Birmingham, riots at, ii. 296 *sq.*, 299, 305
 Birthday, Cowper's, ii. 353
 Blackmore, Sir Richard, i. 147
 Blair's *Lectures*, i. 263, 291, 294, 297 *sq.*
 Blank verse, i. 327, 330, ii. 276
 Blood and slaughter in the *Iliad*, ii. 116
 Blue-mantle, Mr., ii. 370
 Bodham, Mr., ii. 248, 249
 Bodham, Mrs., ii. 246
 Book-binding, i. 338 *sq.*
 Boscawen's victory, i. 180
 Boswell's *Tour*, ii. 224, 225
 Boudoir, the, i. 355 *sq.*
 Bourne, Vincent, i. 111, 115 *sq.*, ii. 211
 Bridge of Olney, ii. 27
 Brighton (Brighthelmston), i. 1, 148, 151, ii. 296
 Bristol, Bishop of, i. 228
 Britannia, figure of, i. 253
 Browne, Rev. Moses, i. 100, ii. 50
 Brydone, Captain, i. 28
 Bucklands, ii. 159, 185, 258, 259, 390
 Bull, Rev. William, i. 188, 211, 232, ii. 159, 161 *sq.*
 Bunbury, ii. 155, 156
 Burke, Edmund, i. 43, 46; his speech against Warren Hastings, ii. 169
 Burnet, Bishop, i. 100, ii. 140
 Burns's poems, ii. 123 *sq.*, 126
 Burrows, Mr., ii. 21 *sq.*
 Bust of Homer, ii. 380, 385
 C . . . , Mr., ii. 159 *sq.*
 Caesar, ii. 71
 Callimachus, ii. 239
 Cambridge, i. 6, 18, 20, ii. 175, 277, 278, 303
 Canal, the projected, ii. 369 *sq.*
 Candidate for parliament, visit of the, i. 287 *sq.*
 Candles, tax on, i. 305 *sq.*
 Caraccioli, the Marquis, i. 280
 Card-table, i. 343 *sq.*
 Carpenter, Judge, i. 94
 Carpentry, Cowper's, i. 415, ii. 207
 Carr, ii. 306
 Carter, Mrs., ii. 121, 122
 Carwardine, Rev. Thomas, ii. 324, 325
 Catfield, ii. 249, 414
 Catharina (Mrs. Courtenay), ii. 305, 334, 344, 389, 395
 Catholic emancipation, ii. 226
 Catlett, Miss, ii. 311, 337
 Cervantes, ii. 159
 Chapman's translation of Homer, ii. 381
 Charity, i. 127

- Charles the First, i. 43, 57 *sq.*,
182 *sq.*
Chatham, Lord, i. 253
Cheltenham, ii. 353
Chester, Mr., Charles, of
Chicheley, i. 388, ii. 109,
221
Chester, Mrs., ii. 132
Chester, Mrs. B., ii. 226 *sq.*
Chesters, the, ii. 36, 206, 263
Chicheley, ii. 139, 206, 238,
263
Children at Olney, i. 367 *sq.*,
376
Christ's Hospital, i. 45
Churchill, C., the poet, ii. 84 *sqq.*
Clarendon's *History of the Re-*
bellion, i. 44, 57
Clarke, Dr., commentator on
Homer, ii. 179, 383
Classical literature, taste in, i.
104 *sq.*
Clergy, character of the, i.
117 *sq.*
Cliff, the, ii. 102
Climate, English, ii. 193 *sq.*
Clock, cuckoo, ii. 223, 225
Coffee-house, Joseph Hill at
the, i. 222
Coke's *Institutes*, i. 97
Coleman, Richard, i. 84, ii.
323
Coleman's Buildings, ii. 211
Collins, W., the poet, i. 282
Colman, George, i. 11, 254 *n.*,
358, 408, ii. 59, 73
Commentators, Greek, ii. 372
Congreve, i. 163
Conversation, i. 133
Conyers, Dr., i. 25, 296
Cook, Captain, i. 204; his
Voyages, i. 251, 308
Copeman, Mr., ii. 359
Cotton, Dr. N., i. 414
Country sounds, i. 310 *sq.*
County Chronicle, The, ii. 214
Courtenay, Mrs., ii. 341
Courtenays, the, of Weston, ii.
359, 369, 385, 408
Covent Garden Journal, ii. 132
Cowper, Ashley, ii. 189 *sq.*,
192, 204
Cowper, General, i. 412, 413,
418, 422, 425, ii. 4, 8, 9,
13, 32, 33, 40, 54, 324, 340,
344
Cowper, Henry, ii. 171, 314
Cowper, Lord, ii. 110, 238
Cowper, Lady, i. 86
Cowper, Major, i. 215
Cowper, William, his brother,
i. 6, ii. 175, 201; his first
mental derangement, i. 8;
success of his first volume,
195 *sqq.*, 202 *sq.*, 219; con-
tentment with his life, 214
sq., 237 *sq.*; his ludicrous
verses written in his saddest
mood, 218 *sq.*; his silence
and absence of mind, 281; his
second mental derangement,
414 *sq.*; walks at Olney,
ii. 34 *sq.*; his removal to
Weston, 70 *sq.*, 75 *sq.*, 88,
99, 106 *sq.*; at Westminster
School, 81; walks at Weston,
103; his father, 135; his
mother's picture, 246, 247,
251; his portrait by Abbot,
323, 325 *sq.*, 328, 355;
his portrait by Romney,
335, 339, 343; his melan-
choly, 338; new edition of
his poems, 355; a whig,
361; his ancestors, 370 *sq.*; his
portrait by Lawrence,
392, 399. *See also* Homer,
Huntingdon, Melancholy,
Olney, *Task*, Unwin, West-
minster, Weston, etc.
Cowpers, the, ii. 31 *sq.*
Cox, Sam, i. 34

- Crazy Kate*, ii. 185, 186
 Cricket, i. 120
Critical Review, The, i. 386
 Critical Reviewers, i. 202, 316
 Cromwell, Oliver, i. 187
 Cuckoo clock, ii. 223, 225
 Cucumber frame, Cowper's, i. 179
 Cumberland, R., the author, Cowper's schoolfellow, ii. 215
 Dancing, ii. 292
 Dartmouth, Lord, i. 70, 357, ii. 26, 27, 69
 Darwin, Dr. Erasmus, ii. 321
 Dashwood, Sir Francis, i. 156
 Deathbed repentance, i. 229
 De Grey, W., i. 83
 Dennis, John, the critic, iii. 74
 Descartes, *vortices* of, i. 248
 Descriptions, Cowper's, drawn from nature, i. 314
 Desk, Cowper's, i. 397, 401
 D'Estaing, i. 163
 Dewsbury, i. 200
 Diomedes's horses, ii. 398
 Dissenters, ii. 297
 Dog, Cowper's, ii. 149, 153
 Donne, John, Dean of St. Paul's, ii. 248
Don Quixote, ii. 159, 196
 Drawing, Cowper's study of, ii. 208
 Dreams, i. 260, ii. 81, 121 *sq.*, 215, 284 *sq.*, 365 *sq.*
 Dryden, i. 169, 174, 285, ii. 85
Dunciad, The, i. 147, ii. 231
 Early rising, ii. 374, 376, 383, 398
 Eartham, ii. 318, 321, 326, 328, 331, 332, 333, 334, 336, 339, 343, 347; Cowper at, 330 *sqq.*
 Earthquake predicted, i. 350 *sq.*
 East India Bill, i. 272
 — Company, i. 275 *sq.*
 Education, public and private compared, i. 90 *sqq.*
 Egmont, Lord, ii. 38
 Elisions, ii. 11 *sq.*, 16, 47
 Epitaphs, i. 71 *sq.*
 Evenings at Olney, i. 223, 250 *sq.*, 282
Expostulation, i. 164
 Eyes, inflamed, ii. 363, 364, 408
 Ezekiel, i. 375
 False ornament in writing, i. 265
 Fashion, changes of, i. 132 *sq.*
 Fever at Olney, ii. 76
 Fire, Mrs. Unwin on, ii. 151 *sq.*
 — at Olney, i. 256 *sq.*
 Fires, incendiary, i. 258
 Flaxman, J., the sculptor, ii. 384, 385, 388
 Flood at Olney, i. 212, 213 *sq.*
 Fog at Olney, i. 234 *sq.*
 Football, i. 120
 Forefathers, our, i. 81 *sq.*
Four Ages, The, ii. 378, 379, 380
 Fox, Charles, i. 101
 Fox-hunters, ii. 172 *sq.*
 France, its part in the American war, i. 226; state of, ii. 277, 280. *See also* French
 Franklin, Benjamin, i. 203
 Freeman, Tom, his misadventure, i. 61 *sq.*
 Freemantle, i. 365, ii. 56
 French, manners of the, i. 75; in revolution, ii. 267; character of the, 342, 355, 370
 Friendships, youthful, i. 92 *sq.*
 Frogs, ii. 363
 Frost, a long, i. 334
 Fuseli, Signor, H., ii. 15, 72 *sq.*, 79, 88 *sq.*, 108 *sq.*

- Gardening, Cowper's, ii. 208 *sq.*
 Gayhurst, i. 38, ii. 37, 91, 93, 137
 Gay's ballad, i. 244
Gentleman's Magazine, The, i. 229, 317, 336, 419, 426, ii. 26
 George the Third, i. 196
 Gibbon, as an historian, i. 238
 Gibbonian oracle, the, ii. 384
 Gibraltar, siege of, i. 223
 Gifford, Mr., ii. 205
 Gifford, Thomas, ii. 264
 Giffords, the, ii. 222
 Gil Blas, i. 203
 Giles gingerbread, ii. 115
 Glass, tax on, i. 31
 Gloucester, Duke of, i. 191
 Goldfinches, Cowper's, i. 245 *sq.*
 Goldsmith, Oliver, i. 383
 Gordon riots, the, i. 68, 76 *sq.*
Gotham, ii. 85
 Gray, Thomas, i. 21, 28
 Great men, the characters of, i. 186
 Greathed, Rev. Samuel (of Newport Pagnell), i. 361, ii. 158, 317
 Greenhouse, Cowper's, i. 55, 134 *sq.*, 230, 231, 242, 310, 423, ii. 209
 Green leaves, ii. 394
 Gregson, Mr., ii. 131, 228 *sq.*, 408
 Grenville, Mr., i. 287, 288, 289
 Guyon, Madame, i. 211, 241, 246

 Hadley, ii. 20, 21
 Hague, the, ii. 201
 Hamilton, Lord Archibald, i. 336, ii. 10
 Hamper, the unpacking of a, ii. 235 *sq.*

 Handel, commemoration of, i. 360
 Handkerchief, present of, ii. 295 *sq.*
 Hanslip fair, i. 61
 Hare, escape of Cowper's, i. 84 *sq.*
 Harpsichord, the, i. 23, 223, ii. 178
 Hastings, Warren, ii. 165
 Haweis, i. 25
 Hawke's victory, i. 180
 Hawkins, Sir John, his *Life of Johnson*, ii. 217, 224, 225
 Hayley, Tom, ii. 344, 345, 348, 357, 365, 366, 389
 Hayley, William, ii. 316, 317, 324, 326, 334, 335, 336, 393, 395, 396, 400; his picture, 357
 Hazeborough, ii. 409
 Heat, excessive, ii. 188
 Hebrew studies, ii. 302
 Helter-skelter manner, Cowper's, ii. 279
Henriade, The, i. 420
Herald, The, ii. 132
 Herbert, Mrs., ii. 412
 Heroism of the Sandwich Islanders, i. 318 *sq.*
 Heron, Robert, i. 375
 Hesketh, Sir Thomas, i. 9, 365, 370 *sq.*, ii. 167
 Hesketh, Lady, i. 389, ii. 53, 60, 68, 77 *sq.*, 80, 88, 89, 93, 106, 167, 210, 216, 235, 272, 273, 309, 382, 396 *sq.*
 Hewitt, Mrs., ii. 249
 Heyne's Homer, ii. 243
 Hill, Joseph, ii. 353, 356
 Hill, Mrs., ii. 232
 Hinchinbrook House, i. 10
 "Hob or Nob," ii. 82
 Hobbes's translation of Homer, ii. 381 *sq.*
 Holland, Lord, i. 33

- Homer, i. 90; doubts as to his authorship, i. 375; his style, 404, 412; Cowper's translation of, 384, 387, 393 sq., 425, ii. 2 sq., 6 sq., 13 sq., 46 sq., 54, 72 sq., 79, 118 sqq., 137, 143, 145, 157 sq., 167 sq., 177, 219 sq., 233 sqq., 242, 245, 252 sqq., 257, 279, 288, 303, 361 sq., 367, 369, 372, 387 sq., 401 sqq.; faults in, 73 sq.; characteristics of, 403. *See also* Pope
- Horace, i. 219, ii. 46, 47
- Hornby, Mr., ii. 89
- Housebreakers, i. 177
- Housekeeping, Cowper's, i. 9 sq.
- Hudibras*, i. 284
- Hume's *History*, i. 57, 66
- Huntingdon, Cowper's life at, i. 6 sqq., 22 sq., ii. 166, 175
- Hurdis, Rev. James, ii. 337, 341
- Hymns for Children, ii. 241
- Iliad* and *Odyssey* compared, ii. 245, 255
- Illumination*, verses, Cowper's, ii. 227
- Imitated nobody, Cowper, i. 314, 329
- Imitation, Cowper's aversion to, i. 158
- Inharmonious lines in verse, ii. 362
- Inversions in poetry, ii. 362
- Ireland, concessions to, i. 346
- Jekyll, Miss, ii. 130
- John Gilpin*, i. 218, 315, 349, 352, 378, 399, ii. 110
- Johnson, Rev. John, ii. 244, 246, 325, 406, 408, 409, 411, 414
- Johnson, Joseph, Cowper's publisher, i. 110, 119, 121, 316, 320, 353, ii. 13 sq., 293 sq., 303, 355
- Johnson, Dr. Samuel, i. 18, 32, 146, 169 sqq., 172 sqq., 209, 282, 283 sq., 354, ii. 7, 224, 289; his edition of the English poets, i. 31 sq.; his criticisms of Milton, 39 sq.; his defective ear, ii. 276 sq., 280
- Johnny of Norfolk (John Johnson), ii. 324
- Jonathan Wild*, *The History of*, ii. 400
- Josephus, i. 264 sq.
- Journals of the House of Lords, i. 3
- Kerr, Dr., i. 382, 397, 406, 425, ii. 27, 281, 317
- Kimbolton, ii. 221
- King, Rev. J., ii. 219, 262
- King, Mrs., ii. 221; Cowper's imaginary likeness of, 202 sq.
- King, recovery of the, ii. 227
- Kingston, ii. 334, 340, 344, 347
- Kitchener, ii. 65
- Kitten, Cowper's, ii. 138 sq.
- Knapps, Miss, ii. 381
- Knox's *Essays*, i. 319
- Lace-makers, the, at Olney, i. 70, 306
- Lace-maker*, *The*, ii. 185, 186
- Landscape drawing, Cowper's passion for, i. 54, 55, 60
- Language, origin of, i. 291 sqq.
- Latin language, dignity of, i. 200 sq.
- Latinisms, ii. 369
- Laureateship, the, ii. 260
- Laurels, Cowper's, ii. 226

- Law cases, poetical reports of, i. 96 *sq.*
 Lawrence, Sir Thomas, the painter, ii. 392, 399, 400
 Lear, King, i. 76
 Leech, Cowper's, ii. 139
 Letter-writing, Cowper's manner of, i. 63 *sq.*
 Lighthouse described, ii. 409 *sq.*
 Lime walk, the, at Weston, ii. 199
 Lincoln's Inn Fields, i. 2
 Linnet, tame, i. 47
 Livy, ii. 71
 Lloyd, Robert, i. 11
 London, Bishop of, ii. 226
Lounger, The, ii. 127
 Lowth's verses, i. 181 *sq.*
Lycidas, i. 39, 284, ii. 257
 Lymington, i. 242, 307
 Lyndhurst, ii. 383
- Macaulay's *History*, Mrs., i. 181, 183, 187
 Mackenzie, Henry, ii. 142
 Maclaine, Dr. A., ii. 201
 Madan, Aunt, i. 22, 25
 Madan, Martin, i. 25, 104, ii. 256
 Maitland, Mrs., i. 19
Man as he is, ii. 375, 401
 Mann, the Abbé, ii. 132
 Mansfield, Lord, ii. 385
 Margate, i. 4, 32, 33, 35
 Market-hill of Olney, i. 199
 Martial, i. 201
 Martyn, Prof. Thomas, ii. 261
 Maty, Dr. P. H., i. 425, 426, ii. 8, 33, 38, 43
 Mazarine's epitaph, ii. 368
 Melancholy, Cowper's, i. 8, 414, ii. 182 *sq.*, 352, 360, 388, 392
 Memnon, statue of, i. 35
 Memory, Cowper's, ii. 216
- Metaphors, longwinded, i. 53 *sq.*
 Milton, i. 175, 284, ii. 12, 17, 253; Samuel Johnson's criticisms of, i. 39 *sq.*; Cowper's dream of, ii. 365 *sq.*; his Latinisms, 369; Hayley's Life of, 392, 395
 Milton's manner, i. 329; numbers, ii. 87; Latin poems, 289; poetical works, Cowper's projected edition of, 306 *sq.*, 314, 315, 322 *sq.*, 349, 350
 Minnows, ii. 364
Minstrel, The, i. 286, 290, 296
 Monopolies, i. 274
 Montfichet, Bertram, ii. 168
 Montgolfier, i. 257, 272
 Monthly Reviewers, i. 219
 More, Hannah, ii. 164, 177, 181 *sq.*, 192
 Morley, Mr., i. 29
 Morley, Miss, 14
Morning Dream, The, ii. 181
Morning Herald, The, ii. 223
 Mortuary verses, Cowper's, ii. 159, 286, 352, 354 *sq.*
 Mungo, Cowper's dog, i. 361 *sq.*
 Music, i. 199
 Myrtles, i. 107 *sq.*; Cowper's, ii. 208 *sq.*
- Nadir Shah, ii. 133
 Negroes, Cowper's ballads on the, ii. 180
 Netley Abbey, i. 365, 370
 New Norfolk Street, ii. 254
 Newport, i. 418, 423, ii. 42, 65, 93, 137
 Newport Pagnell, ii. 150
 Newspapers, i. 191, 205, 223
 Newton, Isaac, i. 248
 Newton, Rev. John, i. 25, 110, 119, 353, ii. 176; his vicar-

- age at Olney, i. 49; his English style, 238; his censure of Cowper, ii. 89 *sqq.*, 93 *sqq.*; last mention of, ii. 411
- Newton, Mrs., ii. 270
- Newtons, the, ii. 200
- Nicholson, Rev. Isaac, i. 12
- Night Thoughts, The*, ii. 51
- Nobleman, eye of a, i. 347
- Nonsense Club, the, ii. 60
- Norfolk, Cowper's letters from, ii. 405 *sqq.*
- Street, ii. 56
- North, Lord, i. 42, 186
- Northampton, ii. 141; parish clerk of, 352
- Northampton Mercury, The*, i. 350
- November, the fifth of, i. 376
- Oaks, old, ii. 205 *sq.*
- Observer, The*, ii. 215
- Ocean, prospect of the, ii. 407, 413
- Odyssey and Iliad* compared, ii. 245, 255
- Old age, insensible approach of, ii. 347 *sq.*
- Olney, i. 25; bridge of, i. 78, 108, ii. 27; Cowper's life at, i. 26 *sqq.*; character of the people of, 217 *sq.*; the pious poor of, 220 *sq.*; the *quidnuncs* of, 224 *sqq.*; fire at, 256 *sq.*; lace-makers at, 306; climate of, ii. 70, 76; Cowper's house at, 109; the spire of, 284
- Orchard, walk in the, ii. 196, 376, 390, 395
- Origin of language, i. 291 *sqq.*
- Ouse, the, i. 7, ii. 102, 232
- Ovid, i. 116
- Oxford, ii. 278, 287
- Oysters, i. 144 *sq.*
- Page, Rev. B., i. 49, 50
- Palmer, Mr., ii. 295
- Pantheon, the, ii. 128
- Paradise Lost*, i. 40, 65
- Parentheses, their use and abuse, i. 201
- Paris, bust of, ii. 187
- Paris in revolution, ii. 342
- Parish clerk of Northampton, ii. 141
- Parliament, dissatisfaction with i. 335
- the Long, i. 187
- Patriot, The Modern*, i. 46
- Patriotic zeal of Cowper, i. 163, 180
- Peace, rumours of, i. 223, 224 *sq.*
- Peace, William, ii. 309 *sq.*
- Penelope, Flaxman's, ii. 388
- Perdition, eternal, i. 228 *sq.*
- Perry, Mr., i. 366
- Peterborough, Lord, i. 368, 377
- Petre, Lord, ii. 80, 205
- Philosophers, i. 160, 161, 247 *sq.*, 291, ii. 62, 264
- Philosophy, natural, i. 262
- Picts, our forefathers the, i. 277 *sq.*
- Picture of Cowper's mother, ii. 246, 247, 251
- Pigeons, tame, i. 37
- Pindaric ode to Cowper, ii. 66
- Piozzi's *Travels*, Mrs., ii. 231
- Pisistratus, ii. 240
- Pitcairne, ii. 390
- Pitt, William, ii. 226
- Poems*, Cowper's, i. 110
- Poetry as an occupation, i. 95
- Poetry Professor (at Oxford), ii. 363
- Poets, ii. 146; their irreligion, i. 282; their lack of virtue, i. 285

- Poets, Johnson's edition of the English, i. 31 *sq.*
 Politics, i. 186 *sqq.*, 262
 Polygamy, tract in favour of, i. 48
 Poor, the, of Olney, i. 341, 346, 410
 Pope, i. 147, 169; as a letter-writer, 63 *sq.*; his style, 265; his vanity, 285; quoted, 270, ii. 313; smoothness of his verses, i. 333; on mercy, ii. 231
 Pope's Homer, i. 387, 399 *sq.*, 404 *sq.*, 411, ii. 7, 167 *sq.*, 274 *sq.*, 301
Poplar Field, The, i. 336
 Praed, Mr., ii. 37
 Presbyterians, ii. 297
 Present good, neglect of, i. 134 *sq.*
 Prince of Wales, ii. 310 *sq.*
 Prior, Matthew, the poet, i. 31, 163, 169, 173, 284
Progress of Error, i. 95, 98, 110
 Propertius, i. 116
 Providence, i. 204
Public Advertiser, The, i. 263
 Puck, ii. 273
 Puss, one of Cowper's tame hares, i. 84 *sq.*, 287, 288, 423
 Quebec, i. 180, ii. 20
 Queen, the, ii. 218
 Raban, Billy, i. 258
 Raban, Mr., i. 99, 104
 Rambles, Cowper's, ii. 103
 Ramsgate, i. 32, 33
 Rap at the door, ii. 282
Rasselas, ii. 402
 Raynal, Abbé, i. 274
 Redbridge, i. 365
Register, The Annual, i. 31, 95
Rehearsal, The, ii. 82
 Religious cast of Cowper's poetry, i. 313
 — professions, i. 177 *sq.*
 Resistance of injuries, i. 128 *sqq.*
 Retirement, Cowper's passion for, i. 237
Retirement, Cowper's poem, i. 142, 148, 149, 152
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, i. 46, 162
 Rhodes, leaping at, ii. 340, 344
 Rhyming correspondence, ii. 201
 Richmond, Duke of, i. 117
 Rigby, Mr., i. 43
 Ring, Cowper's, ii. 222
 Riot at Olney, i. 299 *sq.*
 Ripley, ii. 330, 332, 336
 Roberts, Samuel, Cowper's manservant, ii. 386, 387, 406, 409, 410, 411, 412
 Robertson, W., the historian, i. 66, 238
 Robin Goodfellow, ii. 273
 Robins, Cowper's tame, i. 52
 Rodney, Admiral, i. 205
 Roman writers, late, their false ornament, i. 265
 Romney, George, the painter, ii. 335, 337, 339, 343, 354, 358, 389
 Rose, Samuel, ii. 123, 197, 200, 222, 309, 334, 335, 347, 356, 360, 392
 Rottingdean, i. 239
 Rousseau, J. J., i. 20, 37
 Rowe, i. 163
 Rowley, Admiral, ii. 149
 Rowleys, the, i. 57, 64
Royal George, Cowper's poems on the, i. 251 *sq.*
 Rural ease, i. 314
 Sabbath, violation of the, i. 191 *sq.*

- Saddest mood, Cowper's, i. 219
 Sadler's Wells, ii. 82
 Sailing, Cowper's distaste for, i. 365 *sq.*
 St. Alban's, i. 6, 414, ii. 166 ; Cowper's residence in, 175, 324
 St. Asaph, ii. 265
 St. Giles's, ii. 223
St. James's Chronicle, The, i. 10
 St. Paul, i. 129
 Salisbury, Bishop of, ii. 302
 Samuel, Cowper's manservant, ii. 336, 357. *See* Roberts
 Sandwich Islanders, the, i. 318 *sq.*
 Satire, Cowper's, i. 312 *sq.*
 Savage, the poet, i. 285
 Saville, Sir George, i. 44
 Scenes, delightful, ii. 413
 Schaufelbergerus, ii. 242
 Schools, censure of, i. 326 *sq.*
 Scott, Rev. Thomas (of Olney), i. 100, 140, 268, 289, 367
 Screens, ii. 113
 Sea, the, i. 33, 149
 Seal-rings, ii. 221 *sq.*
 Seashore, Cowper's walks on the, ii. 408 *sq.*
 September weather, ii. 204 *sq.*
 Shenstone, W., the poet, ii. 107
 Sherrington, i. 391, 397
 Shooting-match in *The Iliad*, ii. 399
 Shrubbery, the, ii. 40
 Shuttleworth, Miss, i. 30, 89, 300
 Shyness, Cowper's, ii. 378
 Silver End, i. 108, 126, 135, 235, 259, 306
 Simplicity in writing, i. 265
 Sisyphus, the stone of, ii. 220
 Slander, i. 69 *sq.*
 Slavery, ii. 163 *sq.*, 191 *sq.*
 Smith, Mr. R., i. 124, 157, 216 *sq.*, 313, 402, 403, 406, 410
 Smith, Mrs. Charlotte, ii. 356
 Smollett, his *Don Quixote*, ii. 159
 Smoothness, excessive, of modern verse, i. 333
 Society, origin of, i. 160
Sofa, The, i. 242
 Soldiers in Olney, i. 108, 198 *sq.*
 Sounds, rural, i. 310 *sq.*
 Southampton, i. 14, 19, 365, 392
 — Row, ii. 30
 Spaniel, Cowper's, ii. 149
 Spencer, Lady, ii. 299
 Spinney, the, i. 126, 131, 345, 359
 Spring at Olney, i. 205, 231
 Stafford, Lord, ii. 219
 Steinkirk figure, i. 81
 Stoics, the, i. 2
 Study, Cowper's, ii. 397
 Summer, a rainy, ii. 230, 232
 Sunday School, i. 367, 376, ii. 232
 Sundial at Weston, ii. 386 *sq.*, 390
Suspicious Husband, The, ii. 299
 Sussex hills, the, ii. 330, 333
 Swan, the, at Newport, i. 423, ii. 33, 34, 65, 113
 Swift, quoted, ii. 62
 — and Gay, i. 244
 Swift's letters, i. 28 ; motto, 218 ; style, i. 265 ; language, 294
Table Talk, i. 102, 106, 110, 121, 134
 Tacitus, i. 264
Task, The, i. 320, 324, 330, 353, 386, 392, 416, 417, ii. 19, 50, 58, 175, 186, 199 *sq.*
 Tasso, i. 83

- Taxation, exorbitant, i. 341
- Teedon, Samuel, i. 259 *sq.*,
337, 338, 363, 364, 368, ii.
133
- Temple, Cowper's life in the, i.
163, 383, 384, ii. 21, 148,
175, 201, 230
- Terence, i. 43
- Thames, the, i. 7
- Thanet, Isle of, i. 33, 34, 36
- The*, the article, ii. 11 *sq.*
- Thelyphthora*, i. 48, 103, ii. 83
- Theological Review, The*, i. 268
- Thomson, James, ii. 195
- Thomson's *Seasons*, i. 175, 362;
manner, 329
- Thorn without a rose, Cowper's,
i. 227
- Thornton, Henry, ii. 106, 112,
118
- Thornton, John, i. 403
- Throckmorton, Mr. (afterwards
Sir) John, i. 377, 397, ii. 10,
127, 177, 236, 238, 342,
375; his pamphlet, ii. 287
- Throckmorton, Mr. George, ii.
127, 150, 177
- Throckmorton, Mrs. (after-
wards Lady) i. 131, ii. 58,
80, 137, 150, 151, 178, 181,
185, 342
- Throckmorton, Sir Nicholas,
ii. 166
- Throckmortons, the, i. 301 *sqq.*,
ii. 36, 39, 57, 70, 80, 102,
128, 129, 137, 166, 385
- Thunderstorm at Olney, i. 361
sq.
- Thunderstorms, i. 240 *sq.*
- Thurlow, Edward, Lord Chan-
cellor, i. 41, 194 *sq.*, 196,
254 *n.*, 357 *sq.*, 408, 426
sq., ii. 30, 40, 59, 206, 283,
304, 401 *sqq.*
- Tibullus, i. 116, 170, 245, ii.
96
- Time misspent, ii. 229 *sq.*
- Time-piece, The*, i. 331
- Times, The*, poem of Churchill,
ii. 85
- Tirocinium*, i. 324, 326, 352
- Tobacco, i. 207 *sq.*, 230, 232
- Tom Jones*, ii. 333
- Tooth, extraction of, ii. 148,
151
- Tories and Whigs, ii. 361
- Towers, Mr., ii. 38
- Translation, the difficulties of,
ii. 402 *sqq.*
- Trees, the planting of, i. 215
- Trifling, necessity of, i. 218
- Truth*, i. 95, 98, 110
- Turkish spy, the, i. 6
- Turnpike Bill, ii. 259
- Twopenny, Mr. i. 36
- Tyringham, ii. 38, 369
- Undertaker's dance, ii. 82
- Universities, censure of the, i.
326
- the Scotch, ii. 278
- Unwin, Miss, i. 15
- Unwin, Mrs., i. 15 *sq.*, 22, 23,
24, 25, 373, 379, 382, ii. 28,
210 *sq.*, 226, 282, 330, 331,
332, 335 *sq.*, 338, 340;
Cowper's estimate of her
judgment, i. 194; her care
of Cowper, i. 371, 414 *sq.*,
ii. 63, 77, 121, 313; her
knitting, i. 393, ii. 213, 343;
her walks with Cowper, i.
23, ii. 34 *sq.*; her judgment on
Cowper's poems, 83; on fire,
151 *sq.*; her fall, 218, 221;
no longer able to walk in
clogs, 226; her ill-health,
262, 266 *sq.*, 285, 309, 318,
319, 320 *sq.*, 322, 349 *sq.*,
376, 377, 394; her first para-
lytic stroke, 308; her second
stroke, 316; in her corner,

- 395, 396 ; last mention of, 412
 Unwin, Rev. Morley, i. 21 ; his death, i. 24 *sq.*, ii. 175 *sq.*
 Unwin, Rev. William, i. 20 ; his illness, ii. 101 ; his death, 104 *sq.*, 106
 Unwins, the, i. 12, 19 *sq.*, ii. 166
 Upway, the, ii. 383
- Valediction, The*, i. 254 *n.*
 Verse composition as a mental distraction, i. 372
 — writers, modern, i. 333
 Vestris, i. 308
 Vicarage at Olney, ii. 27
 Villoison's edition of Homer, ii. 236, 238, 239, 240, 241, 375, 383
 Vipers at Olney, i. 210 *sq.*
 Virgil, i. 40, 56, 89, 90, 201, 295, 375
 Voltaire, Cowper's translation of, i. 420
- Walks, Cowper's, at Huntingdon, i. 23 ; at Olney, 344 *sq.*, ii. 34 *sq.* ; at Weston, ii. 103 ; on the seashore, 408 *sq.*
 Walpole, Horace, ii. 282
 War with America, i. 166 *sqq.*, 226 *sq.*
 — rumours of, i. 348
 Wargrave, ii. 396
 Warton, Dr., ii. 244
 Water-lilies, ii. 197
- Watts, Dr. Isaac, i. 146
 Welsh attorney, ii. 117
 West Indies, i. 163, 205, 241 ; hurricane in the, 100
 Westminster school, Cowper at, i. 116 ; 384, 409, 421, ii. 81, 211 *sq.*, 215, 239
 Westminster schoolfellows, club of, i. 354
 Weston, ii. 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 49, 53, 70, 76, 106 ; Cowper's house at, 101 *sq.*, 397 ; chaos at, 294 *sq.*, 346 ; Cowper's affection for, 334, 340, 407 ; Cowper's departure from, 406, 411 ; news from, 408
 Weston Park, i. 126, 200
 Weston Underwood, Cowper's letters from, ii. 98 *sqq.*
 Weymouth, the bay of, ii. 383
 Whigs and Tories, ii. 361
 Whipping, public, i. 259
 Whitehead, Paul, i. 156
 Wilderness, the, i. 355, ii. 186
 Winter, the season of Cowper's poetical labours, i. 111 *sqq.* ; Cowper's preference for, ii. 212 ; at Olney, i. 188, 220, 250 *sq.*, 341 *sq.*
 Wolfe's conquest of Quebec, i. 180
World, The, ii. 223
 Worm, in the sense of serpent, i. 331 *sq.*
 Writers, modern, i. 228
- Zichen's prophecy, i. 350 *sq.*
 Zoilus, ii. 74

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